DRIVEN TO DISTINGUISH : SAMUEL JOHNSON'S LEXICOGRAPHIC TURN OF MIND A PSYCHOCRITICAL STUDY

Ittamar Johanan Avin

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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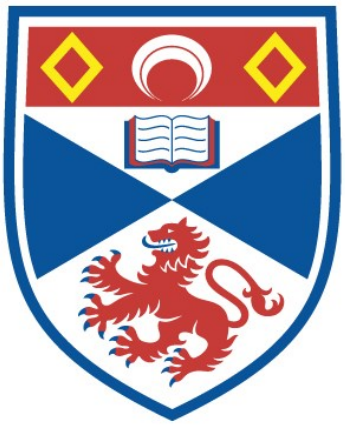

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DRIVEN TO DISTINGUISH: SAMUEL JOHNSON'S LEXICOGRAPHIC TURN OF MIND

A PSYCHOCRITICAL STUDY

A Thesis Presented to the School of English

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ABSTRACT

As a man of letters with an exceptionally extensive and diverse output, Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) has invited consideration from a variety of angles. The present study offers a 'reading' of Johnson as a framer of distinctions. His distinction-making activity is viewed as a capital feature of the oeuvre, characterizing it across almost its entire range. A very substantial body of evidence is adduced in support of this reading. Broken up by distinction-type, the mass of evidence sorts itself out into seventeen different categories themselves grouped under seven 'thematic' heads. The organization of the inquiry on taxonomic lines is intended both to throw into relief the multiform character of Johnson's distinction-making praxis (something not heretofore remarked) and also to provide a comprehensive, systematic and easily 'readable' account of it.

That the evidence testifying to Johnson's distinction-making turned out to be so voluminous could not but occasion the thought that it might be an involuntary activity, a 'drive' grounded in the very 'set' of his psyche which comes in consequence to be viewed as in some sort 'formed for distinction-making'. This thought evolved into the thesis that the present study undertakes to defend, in doing which it becomes a psychocritical investigation inscribed within the theoretical frame of

psychological stylistics whose aim is to make inferences and advance hypotheses about the build and workings of a mind from an analysis of the linguistic and stylistic data it generates.

DECLARATIONS

(1) I, Ittamar Johanan Avin, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately one hundred thousand words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 26/01/96 Signature of Candidate

(2) I was admitted as a research student in January 1994 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the same month and year; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1994 and 1996.

Date 26/01/96 Signature of Candidate

(3) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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I should like to place on record the debt of gratitude I owe to the perspicacity and sound judgment of my supervisor, Mr A H Ashe.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Preface to her book Samuel Johnson and the Scale of Greatness, a study of Johnson's attitude to worldly greatness, Isobel Grundy writes:

> When I first began to pursue these ideas I marvelled that among the many views offered of Johnson nobody seemed to have taken my own, although it pressed itself upon me as central - a position from which the landscape of his works may be triangulated [and] new prospects opened...

The sentiments expressed in this passage well describe my own as I worked on the present study, an inquiry into Johnson's distinction-making activity viewed as a manifestation and mirror of the particular build and bent of his mind. His 'drive to distinguish', as I term it, gesturing by way of this expression to what I regard as a constitutional, inwoven feature of his psychical make-up, struck me too as something central and pivotal - and certainly as a vantage-point from which the 'landscape of his works [could] be triangulated [and] new prospects

opened'. Again, like Grundy, I marvelled, as my work on this study progressed, that, with only two exceptions, Johnson's distinction-making bent, which impressed itself upon me as a pre-eminent feature both of his mental organization and of his oeuvre, appeared almost completely to have escaped critical notice. The two exceptions to which I allude were Kathleen Wales's article "Johnson's Use of Synonyms in Dictionary and Prose Style" (1985), and W K Wimsatt's pioneering book-length study The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (1941). While I was engaged in the research phase of this project, these were the only two investigations I knew of that bore directly upon Johnson's distinction-making activity - though not from the angle that really interested me; that is, the psychocritical angle, thanks to whose 'refractive deflection' it is perceived as both the expression and the evidence of a particular cast and operation of the mind. Then, in April of 1994, well after I had started writing up this study, I came upon Pat Rogers's newly published book on Johnson in the Oxford "Past Masters" series. In his Introduction Rogers makes precisely the connection which by then I was myself working out in detail; in other words, he locates Johnson's distinction-making praxis within the context of

a particular mindset, a particular mode of psychical organization. So it is obvious that there exists a considerable measure of overlap between what he says in his Introduction and what I try to do in this study; accordingly, to cite from Rogers the passage which from my standpoint goes to the heart of the matter is to bring into view the very thesis which it will be my task to defend and substantiate in the ensuing investigation:

> His cast of mind led him towards the central critical task of discrimination. Boswell cites Reynolds...on the way Johnson's views regarding his own friends derived from a particular mental pattern: 'He was fond of discrimination, which he could not show without pointing out the bad as well as the good in every character...' ...Johnson had grown up in the high moment of Augustan critical thought, when discrimination was allied with sound judgement against dangerous and capricious wit. Judgement had been described by a writer whom Johnson had read, Obadiah Walker, as 'the deliberate weighing and comparing of one object, one appearance, one reason with another, thereby to

> discern and choose true from false, good from bad, and more true and good from lesser'. It is this mode of discernment that Johnson habitually practised. We can see it in his moral essays, in his critical works, in his books of cultural analysis (such as the Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland), and regularly in his conversation as reported by the biographers. (6)

Having thus, in his Introduction, propelled into the spotlight the idea of Johnson's distinction-making as the expression of a particular cast of mind, Rogers unaccountably does nothing more with it in the remainder of the book which follows the conventional 'setting, life, ideas and works' format of the Past Masters series. So from one point of view the present study may be seen as an attempt to clothe with evidential 'flesh' the naked frame of Rogers's uncorroborated insights.

And so we arrive at the crucial issue of the role of evidence in an inquiry conducted, as this one is, along psychocritical lines. The essential point, lying at the heart of the issue, is that where something as complex, shadowy and enigmatic as the build and functioning of a mind is in question, the problem will always rather be that

of furnishing enough evidence in support of one's hypothesis than of furnishing too much. In investigations of a psychocritical character, where the quantity of evidence brought to bear is not less important than its cogency, the question really does arise whether one can ever adduce too much of it - not only because this type of investigation cannot hope to carry weight or conviction without a massively solid evidential foundation, but also because such a foundation is the only counter there is, really, to an imputation to which the psychocritical approach is particularly vulnerable, the imputation of circular reasoning. The allegation here is that psychocritical investigations notoriously seek to account for a given linguistic datum in terms of psychological assumptions for which the only evidence is the very datum that requires to be accounted for. The only effective answer to this allegation is to amass a body of linguistic evidence voluminous enough to shield one's psychological hypothesis from refutation on the grounds of circularity (or any other grounds, for that matter). Mindful of these points, I have thought it well to bring forward a very substantial corpus of evidence which, even so, represents only a fraction of what I amassed during the reading and

research phase of this project. I can only hope that as my reader locks horns with the dense thickets of citation in Chapter Three she or he will yet find it possible to allow that things could not have been ordered differently.

The evidential foundation supporting the psychological hypothesis advanced in this study benefits from a uniquely lucky circumstance - the fact that it consists not only of a very ample written component but also of a remarkably comprehensive spoken one which is preserved in numerous "Interviews" and "Recollections", in Sir John Hawkins's Life, in Mrs Thrale's Anecdotes, and, above all, in James Boswell's Life and in the Journal of the Hebrides tour which he undertook with Johnson in 1773. Taken together these documents constitute an archive of Johnson's conversation that is voluminous almost beyond belief and, uniquely in the history of English literature, not all that much less voluminous than the testimony of the written record. The consequence of this stroke of luck is to make Johnson a particularly suitable candidate for treatment from a psychocritical point of view inasmuch as it greatly improves the odds in favour of framing a credible, defensible hypothesis about the build and quality of his mind. How so? Well, if one proceeds from the assumption

(a warrantable enough one, it seems to me) that a mind engaged in generating conversation operates at a level of considerable spontaneity, 'unrehearsedness' and even 'involuntariness' (at any rate, when compared to one engaged in the more planned, more structured, more deliberate activity of writing)[1], it follows that an 'arc' of talk (captured, perhaps, in a conversational transcript) may not unreasonably be viewed as the record of a mind revealing itself with more than usual candour and, in so far, revealing something about its inner workings and true bent. This granted, it follows, with respect to Johnson, that the instances of distinction-making encountered in the conversational record will enjoy a rather special status, asking to be viewed as more than ordinarily significant in terms of their potential for shedding light on the distinctive quality and characteristic workings of his psyche[2]. Not, of course, that the examples of distinction-

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[1] In this connection the following remark by Johnson bears citing: "...in conversation we naturally diffuse our thoughts, and in writing we contract them; method is the excellence of writing, and unconstraint the grace of conversation" (Adventurer 85, II 416).

[2] This conclusion is of course contingent upon our being able to feel confident about the accuracy and trustworthiness of the records of Johnson's conversation that have come down to us. For the purposes of the present inquiry this really boils down to the question of the accuracy of James Boswell's record as presented both in the Life and in the Journal of the Hebrides tour. How trustworthy a witness and recorder was Boswell? In my judgment, trustworthy enough. My reasons for arriving at this judgment are given in Appendix A.

making culled from the written record are not charged with this kind of potential too; they are, but not to the same degree as those drawn from the conversational record. Anyhow, this suggestive potential relating to the 'set' and workings of Johnson's psyche, which appeared to inform a rapidly expanding body of evidence harvested from the spoken and written records alike, rendered the choice of the psychocritical approach more or less inevitable for the present inquiry. It all but chose itself: no other approach seemed as well able to do justice to the suggestive potential just adverted to; no other seemed as well adapted not only to making sense of the signals emanating from the evidential corpus but also to organizing them and turning them to account in the form of a coherent, though possibly controversial, hypothesis[3]. It is not however my wish to be controversial. My aim is to frame a credible hypothesis and to arrive at defensible conclusions. And those will be the more defensible for resting upon data drawn in equal measure from both parts of the evidential record, the spoken and the written alike.

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[3] Another way of putting this is to say that the psychocritical approach was able to "systematize the widest range of facts" - in doing which it satisfied the primary condition for being regarded as the "best kind of theory" (Katz 127).

It is obvious that my claim to be saying something pertinent and plausible about Johnson's 'drive to distinguish', considered as an elemental and inveterate feature of his psychical make-up, can only gain in credibility from a balanced and broad-based use of the evidential record. Mindful of this, I shall be at some pains in the ensuing investigation to draw my evidence in equal measure from Johnson's conversation and writings alike[4].

Fruitful as the psychocritical approach may be when

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[4] It is worth remarking that for Lord Macaulay the dual composition of the Johnsonian record furnished a reason (possibly a pretext; at any rate, an opportunity) for postulating a 'two-Johnsons' hypothesis, in terms of which Johnson the practitioner of the spoken word is viewed as quite distinct from Johnson the practitioner of the written. Thus, in an essay of 1831, which was to become extraordinarily influential, Macaulay argues that in the former capacity, as conversationalist, Johnson could not be faulted: "When he talked, he clothed his wit and his sense in forcible and natural expressions." However, "[a]s soon as he took his pen in his hand...his style became systematically vicious. ...It is clear that Johnson himself did not think in the dialect in which he wrote. The expressions which first came to his tongue were simple, energetic, and picturesque. When he wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese" (II 560). This dichotomizing portrait of a Johnson divided into two more or less uncommunicating halves, the one taking charge of utterance, the other of writing, strikes me as ill-founded in general terms, but certainly at the level of his 'drive to distinguish' it will not bear scrutiny. For all the evidence, drawn from his conversation and his writings alike, lends support to the view that at this level there was but one Johnson who, whether his role at any given moment was that of conversationalist or writer, was subject to a single, indivisible 'lexicographic' compulsion to frame distinctions and multiply discriminations. Indeed, to pass in review the huge body of evidence testifying to his 'lexicographic turn of mind', whether expressed in spoken form or written, is to be persuaded that there was something altogether inevitable about his turn towards dictionary-making in the late forties and early fifties of the eighteenth century.

brought to bear upon the Johnsonian mindset and oeuvre, it will never, even at its most serviceable, possess more than suggestive force; to look to it to produce conclusive 'proofs' is to look to it in vain. This said, I would still however want to insist on the utility and legitimacy of psychological criticism as an investigative and interpretative tool provided it is backed up by enough evidence. The critic, Richard Ohmann, mounts a vigorous (if perhaps over-partisan) defence of this approach, viewing it not just as a much-needed corrective to the privileged position enjoyed at the time (the late nineteen-sixties) by the New Critical doctrine of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the literary text, but as in fact antecedent to this doctrine, and as underpinning it. Here is Ohmann's defence of the psychocritical approach:

> For a long time now it has been common for critics and critical theorists to say that the only legitimate focus for literary study is the work itself, and to mean by that the text: the self-contained structure made of words. That was, and perhaps still is, a salutary doctrine, as against the always present tendency of criticism to drift off into biography on one

> side or into a solipsism of the sensitive reader on the other. But whatever its strategic virtues, the position is strictly speaking untenable. The text in itself, without the background system of the language, is simply marks on a page, or noises. And the locus of a language is the minds of its speakers. Quite literally, the structures and forms in a literary work can only be forms - be realized as forms - in some mind. It follows that literary criticism is the study of mental structures, and that the sense of objectivity one may get from insisting on the "real" work, out there, the work-in-itself, is illusory...
>
> An ecumenical spirit is leading many linguists to think of their subject as a part of psychology. Literary criticism would profit from a similar accommodation... (in Zale 209-10) [emphasis in original]

Taking leave of the psychocritical approach as such, I turn now to a consideration of the data upon which it is brought to bear in the present inquiry. By 'data' I mean the actual instances of Johnson's distinction-making which

are certainly to be numbered in the hundreds - on a conservative estimate. In this context three points stand out as deserving of special notice. The first is that Johnson's distinction-making praxis is multiform; in other words, the distinctions he draws break down naturally into a number of different types or strains. This is a phenomenon that has gone unremarked even by those few critics who have managed to 'tumble to' his distinction-making drive: they have spotted the compulsion, remarked the praxis in general terms but have failed to notice the variety of distinction-types. My own growing awareness of the multiform character of his distinction-making activity arose from the fact that as I accumulated more and more individual examples of it, these tended quite naturally to sort themselves into a number (an increasing number as time went on) of separate batches or sets, each based on distinctive shared attributes. By the time I reached the end of the evidence-gathering phase, the hundreds of items I had collected had sorted themselves out into no fewer than seventeen separate aggregations or categories, each predicated upon a different distinction-type. I next sorted the categories themselves into seven larger groupings, my object being both to point up affinities

between them (the categories, that is) and to lay them out in a more coherent, more 'readable' way. Constituting the larger groupings on a broadly 'thematic' basis, as I saw it, I accordingly conferred upon them such vaguely 'thematic' designations as "Verbal", "Philosophical", "Rhetorical", and so forth. (A tabular digest of the seventeen categories as arranged under the seven 'thematic' heads is presented in Appendix B).

It bears pointing out that among the many hundreds of distinctions framed by Johnson there exist a fair number that may well be described as 'hermaphroditic'; these are items within which are contained the attributes of more than one category, resulting in the phenomenon of category-straddle within the compass of one and the same instance of distinction-making. In the most problematic cases the phenomenon of category-straddle becomes that of category-indeterminacy; this occurs when a given item is of a complexion so ambiguous (because the attributes it contains are so evenly balanced as between rival categories) that it is equally well qualified for inclusion in either; and the question then arises of which of the claimants it should be awarded to. These matters are dealt with in greater detail in the earlier part of Chapter Three. I may

add that when items characterized by category-straddle or category-indeterminacy crop up among my examples, I note the fact in square brackets immediately after the citation.

Just as some individual instances of distinction-making straddle categories, so some of the categories themselves straddle some of the larger groupings. This issue too is dealt with in more detail in Chapter Three.

The second point I want to make is this: such attention as has been paid to Johnson's distinction-making praxis has tended to focus on his handling of antithesis (Wimsatt's 1941 study is an example), a rhetorical figure that posits an antipodal opposition of ideas and hence of the signifiers that gesture towards them. But in fact by far the greater number of distinctions Johnson frames turn not on antithesis but on dissimilitude, which implies unlikeness of an altogether less diametrically opposed cast. Another, more technical, way of putting this is to say that the vast majority of his distinctions turn upon 'graded' (or 'gradient') rather than upon 'polar' oppositions. (To clarify by way of example: 'day' and 'night' are polar oppositions, diametrically opposed contraries; 'morning' and 'afternoon', by contrast, are 'graded' oppositions, that is, instances of unlikeness at

the level simply of dissimilitude). So whereas the concept of antithesis implies clear-cut, sharply polarized oppositions, the notion of dissimilitude evokes instead the image of an extended continuum made up of numerous gradations of unlikeness, 'shallow' in their degree of differentiation at the one end of the scale, though decidedly 'steep' at the other - but never so 'steep' as to become antipodal. That Johnson had in his head some such image, or at any rate that he perceived there was a whole gamut of difference to be traversed before one arrived finally at out-and-out contrariety, is not to be doubted: "he who differs from us", he declared, "does not always contradict us" (Adventurer 107, II 445).

The kinds of difference upon which he seemed to bring his distinction-making powers to bear with the greatest relish, as well as with the greatest dexterity, were those characterized by a notably 'shallow' degree of opposition - in other words, really fine differences. The arena in which he most conspicuously displays his skill in this department is of course his Dictionary of the English Language. No English lexicographer before him had so expertly pinpointed, so skilfully teased apart or so accurately elucidated the fine shades of difference between

the various senses of a given word. The 'brief' he proposed for himself in the Dictionary included, after all, as he informs us in the "Preface", the objective of "separat[ing] similitudes" (in Bronson (1971) 253), by which is meant the pinpointing and 'nailing down' of the fine shades of difference between words 'near allied' (or between the various senses of a single word) which so habitually escape the notice of ordinary understanding that so far as it is concerned such words (or senses) seem to be not dissimilar at all - seem, in other words, to be 'similitudes'. Well, if Johnson is ever about the business of distinguishing between 'similitudes' (as well as between more clear-cut oppositions too, of course) in the Dictionary, he is ever about the same business outside the Dictionary as well. The relish, no less than the address, with which he goes about the task of 'separating similitudes' in the oeuvre outside the Dictionary finds expression in Chapter Three in the form of a well-provisioned category entitled 'Distinctions between Near-Synonyms' which is billetted under the 'thematic' head of 'Verbal Distinction-making'. This category stands out as a conspicuous instance of Johnson's lexicographic bent coming into prominence outside the formal, 'contractually'

determined bounds of the Dictionary; however, considering that the act of distinction-making is situated at the very heart of the lexicographic enterprise and is therefore in its substantive nature a lexicographic operation, it follows that all Johnson's distinction-making is lexicographic in its essential character, regardless of how much, or how little, of this character is ever displayed, or discerned, for what it really is. In other words, his distinction-making praxis is lexicographic by definition: every time he frames a distinction he necessarily enacts a lexicographic 'move'. The two operations are indivisible, and this is something to which I have sought to give recognition in the very title of the present inquiry - not just by way of the reference to Johnson's 'lexicographic turn of mind' in its second segment but also by way of its appositional structure whose built-in parallelism of denotation strongly enforces the suggestion that his impulse to distinguish (the subject of the first member) and his 'lexicographic turn of mind' (the subject of the second) bore importantly upon - were, indeed, profoundly implicated in - each other. There exists another sense too in which Johnson's overall distinction-making praxis may justifiably be described as

'lexicographic', and here I have in mind the way in which it exhibits the same rigour, precision, succinctness and elegance[5] that characterize his distinction-making activity in the Dictionary.

The linguistician R W Brown remarks that "we make distinctions where it matters" (in Hörmann 305). To Johnson it seemed to matter all the time. Hence my

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[5] From the standpoint of their 'well-turnedness', logical tightness, precision and elegance - in other words, from the standpoint of their workmanship and their technical mastery, the distinctions Johnson frames are of notably high quality, as I believe the numerous examples of his praxis marshalled in Chapter Two more than adequately demonstrate. Nor should we expect less from one as practised and expert in this department as Johnson was. Yet even he was not proof against the occasional lapse, as the following instance shows: "To remember and to recollect (said he) are different things. A man has not the power to recollect what is not in his mind; but when a thing is in his mind he may remember it" (Life 1163).

Does what Johnson says here make any sense? To me, I have to admit, it doesn't. For if one's point of departure is that something is not in a person's mind to begin with, can there be any sense at all in speaking of a difference between remembering and recollecting when the one is bound to be as unavailing as the other? And if, conversely, one's point of departure is that there is something in a person's mind to begin with, why should it not be as readily available to recollection as to memory? Either way, then, there appears to be no difference between these two terms - not, at any rate, the kind of difference that Johnson seems to be arguing for. So in proposing the distinction he does, he is really just muddying the issue; and the definitions he gives for 'remember' and 'recollect' in the Dictionary indicate as much, for he there defines them in terms of each other; that is to say, he treats them interchangeably, as synonyms:

remember: "to recollect; to call to mind" (sense 2)
recollect: "to recover to memory" (sense 1)

That Johnson on the rare occasion slips up as a distinction-maker does not of course diminish his insistence upon the strictest standards for distinction-making itself. Indeed, he at times carries his fastidiousness on this score (or his fastidiousness carries him) to hyperbolical, even comical, lengths, as when he puts forward the view that the reader "will not pay much regard to [Sir Richard Blackmore's] determinations concerning ancient learning" once he discovers that "he did not know the difference between aphorism and apophthegm" ("Blackmore", Lives II 251) [emphasis in original].

hypothesis that his was a mind formed for distinction-making; hence my impulse to visualize it as a kind of distinction-making mill. This granted, one ought not, however, to underestimate the role played by Johnson's acquaintance and by his milieu in energizing and exercising his distinction-making bent - keeping it 'on the stretch', and 'on its mettle'. To speak first of his acquaintance: diverse, wide-ranging and including some of the most gifted minds of the age, it constituted a genuine intellectual elite; and when, as often happened, various of its members forgathered with Johnson as a conversational fellowship, his distinction-making powers (as well as his general powers of conversation, of course), spurred by the discussion (and spurring it in turn), invariably shifted into 'top gear'. The conversational fellowship with which Johnson's name is most closely linked was the Literary Club, as it finally came to be known; its membership constituted, in Boswell's words, "a very capital university" (Hebrides Journal 217); in W J Bate's, "the most remarkable assemblage of diverse talents that has ever met so frequently for the sole purpose of conversation" (1975:366). Is it any wonder that Johnson's distinction-making powers, thriving on the regular and vigorous

stimulus furnished by conversational company of such brilliance, were maintained at an exceptionally high level of efficiency and readiness. In Chapter Three I present an extended citation, excerpted from the Life (538-43), which records the dinner-table talk of a conversational fellowship (not the Literary Club); the excerpted passage, orchestrated, like so many others in the Life, as a dramatized scene, opens a revealing window on the way in which Johnson's distinction-making bent, responding to the stimulus provided by an able and seasoned company of interlocutors (as well as by an interesting topic of conversation), kicks into vigorous life and then goes barrelling ahead on full throttle, as it were. The milieu Johnson inhabited likewise gave encouragement to his distinction-making bent. This was the milieu of the Enlightenment, and while certainly he was not always in sympathy with its outlook or ideals (in particular where matters of religion were concerned), the point is, having regard to the kinds of books he read and the circles he frequented, that the air he breathed was Enlightenment air - and the Enlightenment was a milieu in which "distinction, separation...and hierarchy [were] almost self-evident

ethical principles[6]" (Fussell (1965) 120).

These 'self-evident' Enlightenment desiderata have themselves to be situated within the more inclusive referential frame of the epoch's emphatic valorization of analytical thought. Ranking as one of the capital distinguishing traits of the Enlightenment period as a whole, the push towards an analytical orientation also happens to share a significant area of overlap with Johnson's distinction-making bent which by definition is analytical in its tendency. Consequently, the following exposition by Ernst Cassirer highlighting the centrality of the analytical orientation within the Enlightenment outlook can also be seen as providing a contextualizing frame for Johnson's drive to distinguish:

> The philosophy of the eighteenth century...is not content to look upon analysis as the great intellectual tool of mathematico-physical knowledge; eighteenth century thought sees analysis rather as the necessary and indispensable instrument of all thinking in

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[6] In contrast to the animating ethos of the succeeding Romantic age which "is defined by [the] effort to overcome...the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. This is the central creed of the great romantic poets in England, Germany, and France" (Wellek 213, 220).

general. This view triumphs in the middle of the century. However much individual thinkers and schools differ in their results, they agree in this epistemological premise. Voltaire's Treatise on Metaphysics, d'Alembert's Preliminary Discourse, and Kant's Inquiry concerning the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality all concur on this point. ...Voltaire says that man, if he presumes to see into the life of things and know them as they really are in themselves, immediately becomes aware of the limits of his faculties; he finds himself in the position of a blind man who must judge the nature of color. But analysis is the staff which a benevolent nature has placed in the blind man's hands. Equipped with this instrument he can feel his way forward among appearances, discovering their sequence and arrangement; and this is all he needs for his intellectual orientation to life and knowledge. "We must never make hypotheses; we must never say: Let us begin by inventing principles according to which we attempt to explain

everything. We should say rather: Let us make an exact analysis of things..." (12)

Given the native vigour of Johnson's innate distinction-making drive, given the role played by the external facilitating and seconding factors noted earlier, given also his perpetual quest for determinate verbal meaning and perspicuity of statement, for which, as often as not, the drawing of distinctions was a prerequisite condition - given all this it is hardly surprising that he turned out to be an inveterate distinction-maker. Now, while his penchant for framing distinctions has been remarked and formally inquired into by only a handful of professional critics, it has been intuited, not unexpectedly, by a larger number of readers who, after having been 'let into the secret' of Johnson's distinction-making bent, then claim to 'know' (meaning, usually, to have known from the first) all about it. Sometimes this claim goes further, becoming the argument that 'everybody knows' Johnson was an habitual maker of distinctions, so why the to-do of writing up a whole thesis to show it? The third point I want to make is my rejoinder to this argument. To begin with, one would want to say that there always has to be a first time for showing systematically

and comprehensively what 'everybody' supposedly already 'knows'; and my second proposition is that claims to 'knowledge' in the absence, or in advance, of such comprehensive demonstration are invariably found, upon closer examination, to have much less to do with knowledge, properly so called, than with hunches. It seems to me, therefore, that the claim to 'know' (using this verb in a legitimate sense) that Johnson was an inveterate maker of distinctions cannot heretofore have been convincingly sustained because, so far as I am aware, nobody has previously undertaken, in a comprehensive, systematic and detailed fashion, to show him discharging the role of habitual distinction-maker and, in that role, framing distinctions of many different kinds. To that extent, the present study, I believe, constitutes original research - 'original' in both of the senses Johnson specifies for this concept: for even as the ensuing inquiry brings into view "truths hitherto unknown", those already 'known' are "enforced by stronger evidence, facilitated by clearer method...elucidated by brighter illustrations" (Rambler 154, V 59).

* * *

My investigation proceeds according to the following plan: Chapter One consists of a theoretical exposition whose principal focus is psychological stylistics, the particular psychocritical orientation appealed to in the present study to serve as an organizing and referential frame within which to situate, survey and 'triangulate' the Johnsonian oeuvre, both spoken and written. One of the many branches ramifying from the broad trunk of psycholinguistics, psychological stylistics seeks to frame hypotheses about the characteristic 'set' of a mind from an analysis of the involuntary stylistic-linguistic patterns, whether written or spoken, which it generates. Stylistic formations which meet rather strict criteria of distinctiveness and regularity qualify for consideration as 'involuntary', 'unwilled' or 'unconscious' manifestations[7], and, to that extent, as symptoms and tokens of the characteristic 'set' and workings of the mind that produces them. As a theoretical model, psychological stylistics has attracted a fair amount of adverse criticism. One of its most forceful detractors is Stanley Fish whose strictures I summarize and endeavour to counter.

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[7] Cf. Ellegård: "The constant features of an author's style are...likely to be unconscious or subconscious linguistic habits..." (10).

Moreover, as it seems to me, with the advantage of hindsight, that in no small measure it was as a result of my entering the 'hermeneutic circle' (no doubt unwittingly) that I arrived at my sense of Johnson as a maker of distinctions, I also give a brief account of the theory of the 'hermeneutic circle' in the opening chapter.

The second chapter is described in its title as an exercise in 'mindmapping'. What this term gestures to is my attempt to 'map' Johnson's psyche by bringing under scrutiny, in the form of a critical-historical survey, some two hundred and fifty years of comment and opinion on it; this sizable body of data, shaped and patterned as it accumulates, is intended finally to fall into place as a kind of map of the Doctor's mind. The principal patterning devices used are the classification of the eighteenth-century views of his mental character under seven separate heads, and the appraisal of the later data in relation to the two major literary-cultural 'impulses' or forces that have been instrumental in changing the ways of viewing and evaluating his psyche - to wit, Romanticism and psychological theorizing. As the entry into the picture of these forces happened to coincide in each case with the arrival of a new century, Romanticism 'coming in' roughly

at the beginning of the nineteenth century, psychological theorizing roughly at the beginning of the twentieth, it has in consequence been possible for me to organize my survey on a century by century basis. The 'mind-map' I endeavour to construct in this chapter has been assembled with an eye to its contextualizing role and function: it is meant to serve as a backdrop against which my own hypothesis regarding the 'set' and workings of Johnson's mind may be projected; or, to change the metaphor, as a frame into which that hypothesis may be inserted and with reference to which it may be evaluated.

The third, and last, chapter, though very long, is broken up into many sections and subsections corresponding to the seven larger groupings and the seventeen categories amongst which are distributed the very large number of actual instances of distinction-making that in their mass form the evidential base of this study. In bringing forward my evidence, I preface its formal presentation, in each of the categories, with an account of the distinctive attributes shared in common by the items grouped under it. This account is sometimes supplemented by a specification of my grounds for keeping the items making up a given category (or compartment within it) separate from those

making up contiguous ones. In a number of cases I have also thought it well to give an account of the considerations that prompted me in the first place to bring a given category into being as a separate and autonomous entity.

Chapter Three is encumbered with a number of lengthy footnotes. I would have wished it otherwise but they appeared to me to be required by the demands and shape of my overall conception, and so I have let them stay. It doesn't seem to me that their 'gravitational pull' knocks the study as a whole off balance.

CHAPTER ONE

THE THEORETICAL FRAME

The notion that the lineaments of a person's mind are imprinted upon his utterance, mirrored in the configuration of his discourse whether spoken or written, is of ancient provenance. This is attested by a number of proverbs which have come down to us from Greek and Roman antiquity; for example: "hoios ho tropos, toioutos kai ho logos" (speech mirrors character; in Norden 11), "andros character ek logou gnorizetai" (a man is known by the way he talks; in Herford & Simpson XI 272), "oratio vultus animi" (speech is the visage of the mind (or soul); in Spitzer 171), "oratio imago animi" (speech is the copy of the mind/soul; in Hagstrum 97), "[oratio] mentis character" (speech is the mind's imprint; idem). Situated on the same trajectory is Longinus's celebrated pronouncement: "Sublimity [of utterance] is the echo of a noble mind" (in Russell (1965) 9). The Renaissance humanists, in their reverential

appropriation of the culture of classical antiquity, also appropriated, even as they somewhat embellished, the notion of speech as the mirror of a person's mind. So, for example, we come upon the following statement by the notable sixteenth-century Spanish humanist, Juan Vives (the translation from the original Latin is Ben Jonson's, in Discoveries): "Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the Parent of it, the mind. No glasse renders a mans forme, or likenesse, so true as his speech" (Herford & Simpson VIII 625). In similar vein George Puttenham argues, in The Art of English Poesie (1589), that the "continuall course and manner of writing or speech sheweth the matter and disposition of the writers minde...therefore there be that haue called stile the image of man, mentis character; for man is but his minde, and as his minde is tempered and qualified, so are his speeches and language at large..." (in Smith II 154). The ancient sayings, together with their Renaissance restatements, light the way, so to speak, to Buffon's renowned maxim "le style c'est l'homme même" (1753). The underlying attitude shared by all these dicta comes to a point of crystallization in the words of the Prussian

polyhistor Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) who, probably unpremeditatedly, recruits the very metaphor embedded in one of the latin saws cited above: "[L]anguage", he writes, "is never a mere tool of communication, but an imprint of the mind and the world-view of its speakers"(in Mueller-Vollmer 12)[1].

With the Romantic ascendancy in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the centre of gravity in literary endeavour shifts from 'external' topics of whatever kind - the 'manners and morals of men', for example, or the so-called 'text-book' poems of the eighteenth century (Dyer's The Fleece, Armstrong's The Art of Preserving Health,

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[1] For Noam Chomsky language is a 'mirror of mind' in a sense so basic as to bring "biological necessity" into the picture:

> One reason for studying language...is that it is tempting to regard language, in the traditional phrase, as "a mirror of mind". I do not mean by this simply that the concepts expressed and distinctions developed in normal language use give us insight into the patterns of thought and the world of "common sense" constructed by the human mind. More intriguing...is the possibility that by studying language we may discover abstract principles that govern its structure and use, principles that are universal by biological necessity and not mere historical accident, that derive from mental characteristics of the species. A human language is a system of remarkable complexity. To come to know a human language would be an extraordinary intellectual achievement for a creature not specifically designed to accomplish this task. A normal child acquires this knowledge on relatively slight exposure and without specific training. ...For the conscious mind...it remains a distant goal to reconstruct and comprehend what the child has done intuitively and with minimal effort. Thus language is a mirror of mind in a deep and significant sense. It is a product of human intelligence, created anew in each individual by operations that lie far beyond the reach of will or consciousness. (4)

Erasmus Darwin's The Botanic Garden, to name but a few) - to the writer's own interiority as the great literary topic[2]. The predictable consequence of this shift and of the concomitant Romantic doctrine that a "work of art is essentially the internal made external" (Abrams (1953) 22) is a disposition to view the literary artifact as really just "a disguised projection of its author" (ibid. 239), and hence to read back from the work to the mind and personality of that author. What makes the Romantic critics who proceed on these principles recognizably 'modern' is an inclination to appraise the reading-back process as a specifically psychological proceeding - witness Carlyle's observation, made in an essay of 1827, that the "grand question...usual with the best of our own critics at present...is a question mainly of a psychological sort, to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry" ("The State of German Literature", I 38-39).

While therefore the temptation (let's call it an invitation) to make inferences about the build and quality of a mind from the shape, complexion and register - in

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[2] "...one decisive change marks off the criticism in the Age of Wordsworth from that in the Age of Johnson. The poet has moved into the center of the critical system..." (Abrams (1953) 29).

brief, the style - of the discourse it generates is clearly nothing new, this predilection has come to be systematized in our century as a branch of literary stylistics that goes by the name of psychological stylistics or, to use the older appellation, mentalism. In common with all psychological approaches to literature, psychological stylistics tends to look "through the text rather than at it" (Johan Muller, in Ryan and Van Zyl 184; emphasis in original). For the psychologizing critic, therefore, a literary text subsists as a "set of signs which indicates, if correctly read, a second tapestry of signs which in turn charts the psychological activity controlling the 'doing' of literature" (idem). The principal premise of psychological stylistics has been articulated by Louis T Milic in these terms: "...the style of a writer is an idiosyncratic selection of the resources of the language more or less forced on him by the combination of individual differences summarized under the term 'personality'" ("Unconscious Ordering in the Prose of Swift" in Leed 82). This premise harbours a number of assumptions and entailments that bear inquiring into.

A key assumption is that the features of a writer's (or speaker's) style which most truly open a window on the

build and workings of his psyche are the ones that are 'more or less forced on him' by his 'personality'; the reference, in other words, is to stylistic peculiarities and regularities that are an involuntary, unpremeditated product of his mental operations and organization - his unconscious choices, in short. These kinds of choices need to be distinguished from others whose occurrence in a text will not be 'stylistically relevant', meaning that they cannot qualify as 'style-markers' capable of providing insight into the configuration of a writer's psyche. Subsumed under this head are verbal collocations so common that they may be expected to occur with great frequency in any text (e.g. "in the...", "from a...", even "not only...but also..."). The verbal and syntactical formations which cluster at the opposite extreme equally fail to qualify as style-markers indicative of involuntary stylistic choices - in this case however because of the high degree of deliberateness and artifice they exhibit; encountered under this head are (to cite Milic once again) "significant lexical choices, word order for emphasis, the kinds of sentence arrangements which are subsumed under some of the rhetorical figures...and the logical ordering of the parts of the discourse" ("Rhetorical Choice and

Stylistic Option" in Chatman 85-86). These conscious (often, indeed, self-conscious) determinations Milic labels "rhetorical choices" while the unconscious ones that are truly revelatory of the 'set' of a writer's mind he calls "stylistic options"[3], and these latter tend to be "manifested at the...syntactic level" (ibid. 85). To give an example: Richard Ohmann calls attention to Saul Bellow's relish for (more properly, perhaps, his addiction to) post-nominal modifiers (ordinarily participles, past or present, following the noun they refer to; also appositive phrases). As this feature of style marks a deviation from the normal pattern of English syntax which favours pre-nominal modification (i.e. noun preceded by adjective), it invites notice as a stylistically relevant manifestation, the more so considering how frequently Bellow makes use of it. To illustrate his point Ohmann cites the following passage from Herzog:

> Moses, a collector of pictures, had kept a photograph of Madeleine, aged twelve, in riding habit. She was posed with the horse, about to

[3] To my mind Milic's use of the word "options" is not a happy one since for a term intended to characterize unconscious selections it implies too great a degree of conscious choice. A more felicitous term which describes the same phenomenon as that gestured to by Milic's phrase is Richard Ohmann's "stylistic intuitions" ("Mentalism in the Study of Literary Language" in Zale 195).

> mount, a stocky long-haired girl with fat wrists and desperate dark shadows under her eyes, premature signs of suffering and of a craving for revenge. (Ohmann's emphasis)

Commenting on the passage, Ohmann writes: "Here ten post-nominals, some with pre-nominals embedded, crowd into two sentences...and this concentration is only a little out of the ordinary" ("Mentalism in the Study of Literary Language" in Zale 197). As for the "conceptual impulse" (ibid. 199) lying behind the novelist's idiosyncratic passion for post-nominal modifiers, Ohmann advances the following hypothesis: noting that "post-nominals...represent a compact and efficient form within which to house incidental or supplementary information", he ascribes Bellow's appetite for them to an impulse to admit into his novels "a generous quota of contingent circumstances, as if in wry acquiescence to their plenitude and oddity" (ibid. 200).

Ohmann's procedure involves moving from the observed data to the specification of an aspect of Bellow's novelistic psychology. The move he executes is, accordingly, an interpretative one: he offers an interpretation of the particular 'set' of Bellow's writerly

mind in light of the data he has marshalled. The point being enforced here is that every exercise in psychological stylistics is, ipso facto, an exercise in interpretative stylistics. It is only logical, then, that in the schema of the various categories of stylistic investigation compiled by Peter Cassirer (see insert)[4], psychological stylistics should fall under the heading "Interpretative". Actually it does not show up under this head (or under any of the others) in the schema, but in the surrounding argument of which the chart is but a digest, Cassirer makes good the omission: "Interpretative stylistics can be one tool in interpretation," he writes, "a method of hermeneutics in that certain style-types...can be

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[4] More recently, thanks to the interest generated by reader-response criticism, a new category of stylistics has come into being which does not feature on Cassirer's chart. This is 'processing stylistics' the object of which is to throw light on the information-processing strategies that are in play during the activity of reading. In effect, the object is to specify "the mental operations underlying reading" (Taylor 100). In France or Germany this kind of inquiry would be thought of as an investigation into the 'phenomenology of reading'. What, however, makes 'processing stylistics' a recognizably 'stylistic' enterprise is its assumption that "the styles of different authors may be described in terms of the types of mental operations they characteristically make readers perform" (ibid. 99).

A recent issue (vol 22:1-2, Sept. 1993) of Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Literature the Media and the Arts testifies to the topicality of processing stylistics. This issue, a special one, is devoted to "Psychological Mechanisms in Literary and Aesthetic Comprehension". The Issue Editor's Introduction opens with these words: "The articles in this special issue examine the psychological representations and processes that occur when individuals comprehend literature, art, and media" (Graesser 1). It is evident from this statement that processing stylistics, as currently conceived, does not confine itself to literary discourse.

Figure 3.

GOAL	MATERIAL	LEVEL
PRESCRIPTIVE	sounds, words, clauses, sentences, text	style-value style-level
DESCRIPTIVE	from sounds to things, from punctuation signs to the intention of the speaker/writer; text (s)	style-elements style
DISTINCTIVE	texts	style-elements
ARGUMENTATIVE	conative and arguing texts, pseudo-objective texts	style-elements relevant for the special issue
INTERPRETATIVE	text(s) the meaning of which is not directly apparent	style-elements contributing to the meaning of the text or which give clues to the intention of the speaker/writer

QUESTIONS	METHODS	CONCEPT
does it sound well? is it understandable? does it fit to context?	(evaluative criteria)	"Style is the way in which one solves the problem of giving one's words the intended effect"
how is the content of the text communicated?	qualitative and quantitative analysis	Style is the aggregate and structure of all stylemarkers in a text. (What gives a text-element the status of stylemarker has to be made clear in a style theory)
who has written . ? has X written . . ? what differences are there between text p and q?	comparative analysis with aid of statistics or other quantitative methods	Style is the difference between texts or between a text and a norm
is the argumentation correct? which is the purpose of the text and the intentions of the speaker/writer? what effect does the text have?	semantical and logical analysis, analysis of purpose and effect	Style is the way in which a writer/speaker affects and/or influences the reader/listener
what does the text say and what does it mean? how is the import of the text communicated?	hermeneutics, semantic context-analysis	Style is the way in which a content is presented

demonstrated to be indicative of an author's ...psyche" ("On the Place of Stylistics" in Ringbom 39).

Precisely because psychological stylistics is an approach predicated upon interpretative moves rather than, say, merely descriptive ones, it becomes most important to ensure that one appeals to the right kind of data, the right kind of evidence - the kind that will support a defensible interpretation. One cannot assume that any and every work written by a given author is necessarily admissible as evidence in psychological stylistics. Where this approach is concerned, it is a mistake to adopt a simple, 'straight-line' form of reasoning, arguing that as an author's writings bear the imprint of his mind, therefore an analysis of those writings, if only it is exhaustive enough, will necessarily open a window on that mind, regardless of the nature of the evidence appealed to. In her hefty book, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us, an ambitious and exhaustive exercise in psychological stylistics, Caroline Spurgeon comes to grief, it seems to me, precisely for want of paying heed to the imperative need to consult the right kind of evidence. In the absence of any but the sparsest biographical data, in the absence of any documentation other than the plays and poems, she

rests her whole case on these in her endeavour to throw light, through a study of their imagery, on "Shakespeare's personality, temperament and thought" (ix). But what she seems to forget, or disregard, is the axiom of authorial 'volatilization' or, at any rate, authorial impersonality, where dramatic writings are concerned. One wouldn't want to claim as much with regard to the other major Kinds, but in the case of drama authorial impersonality has to serve as a 'point-of-departure' postulate. This granted, it follows that all claims to be able to 'recover' a dramatist or his thoughts from his plays are simply chimerical. If this holds true for dramatists in general, it is truer still of Shakespeare given the sparseness of the biographical record. So, to be legitimate, one's point-of-departure pemise would have to be that what Shakespeare put into his plays, imagery included, was tailored to <u>their</u> dramatic requirements, to the needs of plot, theme, mood and characterization, rather than to a desire to project himself covertly into their fabric. Given this assumption there is no escaping the corollary that even supposing Shakespeare's temperament and thoughts really were 'in' his plays and poems, how could the inquirer ever know it? How could he know where to look for them? How could he ever

be sure he had found them[5]? Yet Spurgeon proceeds as if she can know, as if she does know, despite a tremor of doubt that occasionally impedes her forward motion: "But we cannot always be sure that this view is not just that of the character speaking..." (151), she admits at one point. What she should have asked herself, however, is "Can we ever be sure...?" But she doesn't[6], and so, driving on regardless, she courts trouble and, predictably enough, finds it - in the form, for example, of this ludicrously (one could say grotesquely) far-fetched inference which crops up in the chapter entitled "Shakespeare's Tastes and Interests (Indoor and other Interests)":

> By 1599, when he was five and thirty, Shakespeare has probably experienced heartburn

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[5] George L Kittredge poses these very questions - within the context, interestingly, of a persuasion that Shakespeare is indeed present in his plays. The position he upholds is, therefore, that while Shakespeare is present in the plays he is at the same time unsearchable and 'unextractable'. "Unquestionably the man is there," writes Kittredge, "the real Shakspere is somehow latent in his plays: but how is one to extract him?...[He] pervades and vivifies the whole but eludes analysis and defies extraction..." (47, 51).

One feels that if Spurgeon had suffered herself to be restrained by Kittredge's caveats (ventured in 1926, ten years before she published her own book), she could have saved herself a good deal of embarrassment.

[6] One could say that Spurgeon's failure lay in not being sufficiently attentive to an important principle of investigative procedure which Suzanne Langer has formulated as follows: "The...treatment of a problem begins with its first expression as a question. The way in which a question is asked limits and disposes the ways in which any answer to it - right or wrong - may be given" (1).

as the result of acidity, and realises that musty food needs a good stomach to digest it...and it is now we get the first indication of his extreme sensitiveness to nicety and cleanliness at table and his dislike of food ill kept and ill served of which we are so conscious a few years later, especially in Troilus and Cressida.[7] (119)

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[7] There is an argument to be made for viewing Spurgeon's book (published in 1936) as the culmination of a particular strain of Shakespearean criticism which may be designated 'bringing to light the hidden Shakeseare'. This curious manifestation in the history of Shakespearean exegesis was a product of the Romantic ascendancy. As I have already noted, one of the major changes wrought by the Romantic restructuring of perspective in the first decades of the nineteenth century was the shift from outer to inner, and specifically the shift from a view of poetry as 'external', as simply "the refined and pleasing communication to educated ears of an aspect of civilized and generalized humanity" (Daiches IV 856) to an 'inward' view of it as the record and expression of the poet's interiority - his inner self, his inner life.

One may theorize that it was but a short step, and one soon taken, from the Romantic persuasion of poetry's being revelatory of an inner self to a persuasion of its being revelatory of a hidden self, a persuasion to which Arnold's poem "The Buried Life" bears witness, as does Herder's conception of poetry as "a dangerous betrayer of its author" (in Abrams (1953) 236).

It did not take long, it seems, for the Romantic notion of a hidden life to be recruited to Shakespearean criticism as an interpretative lens through which to view the oeuvre, a development invited not just by its richness and suggestiveness but also by the absence of any curb (in the form, say, of biographical data) on fanciful speculation. The consequence was the periodic appearance during the nineteenth century of works of criticism purporting to bring to light different hidden facets of the Bard; and the suggestion accompanying each such revelation was that its version of the hidden Shakespeare was the really authentic one. These curious exercises in Shakespearean reclamation may well be regarded as the forebears of Spurgeon's very much more sophisticated study. The particular hidden facet of the Bard each of them claimed to be retrieving is readily enough inferred from the titles they respectively bear; here is a sampling:

1828: "Shakespeare a Tory and a Gentleman" (Hartley Coleridge)

Avoiding the trap into which Spurgeon stumbled, John Carey has been altogether more successful, it seems to me, in his application of the mentalist approach to the oeuvre of John Donne. His book John Donne: Life, Mind and Art rests on much solider ground than Spurgeon's on Shakespeare. He has to hand a fair amount of biographical data and also enjoys the advantage of having at his disposal a variety of source materials including sermons, letters, meditations and the youthful 'evaporations of wit' in addition to the poetic corpus much of which, for sound reasons it seems to me, he views as autobiographically based (certainly, as regards the "Songs and Sonnets" and the "Elegies", his operative premise clearly is that author and speaker are one). He is therefore much better placed than Spurgeon was to arrive at defensible mentalist conclusions. These conclusions are either 'local', i.e. grounded in only one or a few items, or 'continental', i.e. bearing upon the oeuvre as a whole or upon the greater part of it. An example of the former is this comment: "The

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1865: Shakespeare, his Inner Life as Intimated in his Works (J A Heraud)
1871: Was Shakespeare a Lawyer? (H.T.)
1883: Shakespeare as an Angler (H N Ellacombe)
1884: Shakespeare as a Physician (J P Chesney)
1897: Shakespeare an Archer (W L Rushton)
(First item in Abrams (1953) 247; remainder in Butler and Fowler 519)

hard, jubilant tone of 'A Burnt Ship' corresponds, in fact, to a pitiless element in Donne's nature..." (95). Of the latter:

> The principle of joined opposites...permeates Donne's poetry. He works by joining. But before he could be obsessed by joints he had to be obsessed by division. The mind which strives to unite east and west must be unusually conscious of their separation...Donne's vision was conjunctive only because it was disjunctive, and he synthesized only because he was by nature analytic. He created the fragmentation which he strove to overcome. (266)

Something that emerges clearly from Carey's study is a conviction that the stylistic features which most illuminatingly open a window on "the distinctive structure of Donne's imagination" (10) are those in which habitual or involuntary mental operations - in other words, his unconscious choices - are assumed to have played a determining role. It is for this reason that in his interpretation of the evidential record Carey so often has recourse to the vocabulary of involuntary affective and mental activity:

...chance repetitions...the reflex actions of a mind which spent its whole life making phrases. (12)

His soul felt impelled to reach for peaks and zeniths. (100)

The urge to express the inexpressible, and think the unthinkable... (125)

The imaginative drive towards union... (267)

The impulse to bind opposites... (269)

To a mind possessed by simultaneity... (276)

...habits of mind simultaneously dualistic and synthesizing... (278)

...examples of his synthesizing instinct... (279)

Carey's philosophical forebear, whether he realizes it or not, was Leo Spitzer (1887-1960) who is nowhere mentioned in his book. Spitzer ranks as arguably the most distinguished mentalist critic of this century[8]. Though guilty on occasion of allowing his fancy to get the better

[8] A 'soft' psycholinguist of the hermeneutic persuasion, Spitzer aims at a result that is "better or worse"; he is to be distinguished from 'hard' psycholinguists of the positivist persuasion who, claiming to be less impressionistic and more 'scientific' (= more statistical), aim at a result that is "right or wrong" (N E Enkvist: lecture, University of Natal, Durban, 6 October 1995).

of his judgment[9], Spitzer's investigative methodology, viewed in the context of his mentalist brief, strikes me as on the whole responsible; and the investigations themselves, orchestrated as quests for the "psychological etymon...the radix in [the] soul" (13) of the chosen authors, are wonderfully stimulating and suggestive as they reveal him assembling his "psychogram[s]" (15) bit by bit. An instance is his essay on Diderot's style where he focuses on

> a rhythmic pattern in which I seemed to hear the

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[9] One such lapse is noted by René Wellek in his essay "Stylistics, Poetics, and Criticism". "[O]n very little evidence", writes Wellek disapprovingly, "Leo Spitzer considers what he calls 'the fait-accompli construction in Spanish [to be] a linguistic reflection of Spanish Utopianism, of the Spanish plus ultra will'" (in Chatman 66).

In advancing this rather eccentric opinion Spitzer betrays the influence of a distinctively German 'slant' in psychological stylistics, according to which the linguistic and stylistic traits of a language were viewed as expressive of national character, of a nation's 'soul', of its peculiar 'genius'. This viewpoint, which is now only of historical interest, drew its inspiration mainly from 19th-century philological investigations, and in particular from Wilhelm von Humboldt's extended essay on the philosophy of language entitled The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind (published posthumously in 1836). In this treatise von Humboldt propounded the principal philosophical bearings of the 'German slant'. The following passage gives the gist of his outlook:

> The comparative study of languages...loses all higher interest if it does not cleave to the point at which language is connected with the shaping of the nation's mental power. ...Language...is the organ of inner being, this being itself, as it successively attains to inner knowledge and outward expression. It therefore strikes with all the most delicate fibres of its roots into the national mentality; and the more aptly the latter reacts upon it, the more rich and regular its development. (21) [emphasis in original]

> echo of Diderot's speaking voice: a self-accentuating rhythm, suggesting that the 'speaker' is swept away by a wave of passion which tends to flood all limits. This pattern...is apt to appear, with varied nuances, anywhere in Diderot's writings...The conclusion seemed obvious that this rhythm was conditioned by a certain nervous temperament which, instead of being tempered by style, was allowed to energize style. (135)

However much care the practitioners of psychological stylistics take to ensure that the evidence they appeal to is relevant, however responsible they are in the use they make of it, the approach still has not escaped the charge that at a fundamental level (as distinct from a merely procedural one) it is irremediably flawed. This charge has been energetically voiced by Stanley Fish echoing similar animadversions expressed earlier, though more decorously, by, among others, Wellek and Warren[10]. As a critical

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[10] In their book Theory of Literature, once a standard reference work, Wellek and Warren write:

> [H]owever ingenious some of its suggestions may be, psychological stylistics seems open to two objections. Many relationships professing to be thus established are not based on conclusions really drawn from the linguistic material but rather start with a psychological and ideological analysis and seek for confirmation in the language. This would be unexceptionable if in practice

approach, argues Fish, psychological stylistics is disabled by a built-in tendency towards arbitrariness lurking in the "unexamined and highly suspect assumption that one can read directly from the description of a text...to the shape or quality of its author's mind". The problem, as he sees it, is not that this kind of move cannot be executed but, on the contrary, that it <u>can</u> be executed "all too easily and in any direction one likes". Consequently, whatever the interpretation one finally arrives at, it will never be able to rise above the level of mere assertion; conclusive demonstration is forever out of reach "because there is nothing in the machinery [of psychological stylistics] to authorize the leap from the data to a specification of their value" ("What is stylistics and why are they saying such terrible things about it?" in Freeman 55).

In addressing myself to Fish's objections, let me say at once that I think he is both right and wrong. When he

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> the linguistic confirmation did not itself seem frequently strained or based on very slight evidence. ...Furthermore, the assumption of a necessary relationship between certain stylistic devices and certain states of mind would appear fallacious. For example, in the discussion of the Baroque, most German scholars assume an inevitable correspondence between dense, obscure, twisted language and a turbulent, divided and tormented soul. But an obscure, twisted style can certainly be cultivated by craftsmen and technicians. The whole relationship between psyche and word is looser and more oblique than is usually assumed. (187-188)

complains that reading from a text 'to the shape or quality of its author's mind' opens the door to arbitrary interpretations, he is plainly right. That danger certainly exists. On the other hand, arbitrariness is a built-in danger attendant upon any interpretative undertaking in the human sciences. Do the exigent interpretative conventions guiding Leavisean-style 'close reading' render it immune to arbitrary interpretations and impressionistic curvets and caprioles of all kinds? By no means. As René Wellek correctly observes, "'[c]lose reading' has led to pedantries and aberrations"; and he adds, irrefragably, "as have all the other methods of scholarship" (9).

Taking the argument a step further, I would want to maintain that arbitrariness is basically a fault of method, of procedure; Fish however implies that where psychological stylistics is concerned arbitrariness is built into its very fabric, into its fundamental structure; his suggestion is that in its very nature it is an arbitrary praxis. Here I think he is wrong, and he is wrong because he mistakes procedural imperfections for structural ones. Who would deny that a critical approach, any critical approach, is liable to be disabled by

arbitrary procedures or by irresponsible methodology. But that doesn't mean that it is thereby invalidated at the more basic level of its fundamental assumptions and goals. In suggesting that such is the case where psychological stylistics is concerned, Fish errs.

Furthermore, because in those instances where psychological stylistics does fall short, the reason for it has to do, in my view, rather with procedural and methodological deficiencies than with fundamental structural ones, I cannot agree with Fish that findings in this domain can never rise above the level of mere assertion. Given a responsible methodology applied to the right kind of evidence, it is indeed possible to move beyond (well beyond) simple assertion. I think, for example, that E P Thompson succeeds in doing so in his book on Blake which he describes as "an enquiry into the structure of Blake's thought and the character of his sensibility" (xix); and I have no doubt of Carey's success in the book on Donne; consequently, I would characterize his findings as educated judgments, not mere assertions. His study shows that there can be quite a lot in the 'machinery' of psychological stylistics to 'authorize the leap from the data to a specification of their value'. And

I am bound to add, with reference to my own inquiry, that the quantity of evidence pertaining to Johnson's distinction-making which I have amassed, together with (in my judgment) its soundness, leads me to believe that there is in fact much to 'authorize the leap' from the data to the conclusions I shall be venturing about the build and quality of his mind; nor, by the way, do I believe it will be that much of a 'leap'; I see it as being more like a studied stride. To be sure there is the other side of the coin too - not a few of Spurgeon's conclusions do turn out to be mere assertion or fanciful speculation. But her failure, as I argued above, has more to do with appealing to the wrong kind of evidence than with choosing a critical approach that is inherently flawed.

One thing of course is indisputable: psychological stylistics will never be able to deliver 'watertight' interpretations revelatory of objective truth. But then no interpretative model in the human sciences can hope to attain to objective knowledge. To approach probability is the best that can be hoped for. Seymour Chatman has judiciously observed that in interpretative undertakings "the only criteria are consistency and adequacy, not some discoverable jewel called truth" (in Ringbom 43). In the

present inquiry the criteria I shall hope to satisfy will be precisely those of consistency, adequacy and probability. I shall not be looking to do more. Fish, however, appears to suggest that psychological stylistics is under an obligation to do better than just approach probability; he seems to want it to provide conclusive demonstrations. If this sense of his expectations is correct then Fish himself incurs an obligation - to explain why he should hold psychological stylistics to standards more exigent than those that would apply to other interpretative models, and the more so as this one makes no claim to offer certain knowledge or conclusive demonstrations, despite occasional loose talk by some of its practitioners[11]. So it seems to me, in sum, that Fish is blaming the psychocritical approach for not doing what it neither claims to do nor aims to do. That is manifestly unfair and points to his having misunderstood its agenda.

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[11] John Carey is guilty of such a lapse at the end of his book on Donne. After noting Donne's "lasting sense of isolation from some greater whole...his disjunction from the Catholic Church...the long-drawn-out failure of his secular career", Carey advances the view that Donne's "desire for a church that would swallowup all existing churches..., and his wish to be united with 'the body of this world' are examples of his synthesizing instinct which obviously relate to these biographical concerns" (278-279).

It seems to me that the word 'obviously' is one mentalist critics should steer well clear of. It implies a degree of irrefutability that is not at all consistent with what the mentalist approach is capable of delivering.

For the most psychological stylistics can hope to do is suggest; and if it manages to be suggestive in a persuasive, stimulating and illuminating way it has done all that can reasonably be asked of it. For that reason I shall be well content if by the end of this study I shall have managed to suggest something plausible about the build and quality of Samuel Johnson's mind[12].

Turning now to the objections levelled by Wellek and Warren: they are clearly correct in alleging that the possibility exists in psychological stylistics of using the data simply in order to seek confirmation for a pre-formed psychological theory. But this is really to misuse the data and, in so far, to abuse psychological stylistics as a critical approach. Any critical method after all is open to abuse of one kind or another ("[W]hat is there which may not be perverted?" Johnson reminds us: Rambler 85, IV 85), and to urge the view that the method as such is invalidated

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[12] In this endeavour I shall really be doing no more than Johnson himself was attempting to do when he composed the biographical-critical Prefaces that are now known to us as The Lives of the Poets. As Pat Rogers puts it, Johnson, in writing these Prefaces, was "seek[ing] fundamentally" to assemble "a mental construct of the [poet] in question, and events are utilized to build up this portrait, rather than to establish a definitive life-history" (93).

Robert Griffin adumbrates a philosophical context for the kind of psychologizing project Johnson was engaged in when he wrote the Lives: "The delineation of a poetical character is a form of reflection equivalent to the argument from design in philosophy. Criticism discovers the mind of the author in his works, just as philosophy considered the mind of a Creator through His creation. The old analogy which made God a poet hovers in the background" (152).

on that account is surely unreasonable. Relating these issues to my own encounter with Johnson, I ought perhaps to place it on record that I had no pre-formed psychological theory about him[13]. In the course of some

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[13] Apropos of pre-formed theories about Johnson (not necessarily psychological ones), consider the following programmatic statement taken from a recent (1992) book dealing with the Rambler essays and voguishly titled Samuel Johnson after Deconstruction. The author, Steven Lynn, makes it sufficiently clear that he not only has a pre-formed theory about Johnson (in fact, he all but boasts about it), but that this theory was framed in order to subserve a pre-formed objective:

> Motivated by my own desire to salvage and justify some sort of belief in a Transcendent Other, I have read that interest back into Johnson's Rambler to the exclusion of other concerns. I have read The Rambler, which appears to be concerned with many things, as a single-minded evangelical document, casting Johnson as a lay preacher out to win our souls for God. In this reductive misreading deconstruction has been conscripted as my accomplice, disarming the normative forces of genre and history that would otherwise restrict my movements. Able to violate these conventions, reading The Rambler differently, I have disagreed at/on one point or another with virtually every Johnsonian living and dead including at times the original Johnsonian himself. (157)

Faced with a statement of this kind one stands bemused. One hardly knows how to respond other than to observe that it now seems as if any kind of folly is admissible provided only that it is committed self-consciously, with eyes fully open. If the position and procedures adopted by Lynn are the harvest of post-stucturalism's aggrandizement of 'reflexivity' and of 'reading against the text', then post-structuralism has quite a bit to answer for.

Lynn may quite possibly believe that in adopting the position he does he has won his spurs as an avant-garde member of the deconstructive caucus, but in point of fact his proceeding is more reminiscent of the interpretative practices of mediaeval biblical commentators who, though "well aware that Homer and Vergil had been pagans who could not consciously have intended or communicated Christian meanings" (Hirsch 77), never let that difficulty stand in their way as they continued unperturbed for centuries on end to allegorize the ancient pagan texts (notably Vergil's fourth 'Messianic' eclogue) in palpably anachronistic Christian terms.

As Lynn's study deals with the Rambler essays he must know that in number 106 of the series Johnson makes reference to authors who "are forgotten because they never deserved to be remembered" (IV 201). Before embarking upon the writing of his book he should have taken heed of those words.

quite wide-ranging reading in the Johnsonian corpus I began to notice his predilection for distinction-making, and then at a certain point, though I cannot say exactly when, the idea took shape that this might have to do with the way his psyche was organized. I would now contend, having the advantage of hindsight, that the point at which that idea took shape was the point at which I entered the hermeneutic circle.

In invoking the concept of the hermeneutic circle, as elaborated in particular by Martin Heidegger, I am appealing to a theoretical model which I believe accounts not only for my own interpretative 'moves' with respect to Johnson, but for interpretative processes in general. In terms of this model the processes of understanding and interpretation always involve a back and forth movement between the part and the glimpsed (or intuited) whole. This back and forth movement is ordinarily conceptualized as a kind of to-and-fro progress through the arc, or through the whole, of a circle: "in order to understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts, while to understand the parts it is necessary to have some comprehension of the whole" (Hoy vii). Less abstractly formulated is Ian Maclean's account of the way the

interpretative circle actually works in practice:

> The circle is that movement from a guess at the 'whole' meaning of a work to an analysis of its parts in relation to the whole, followed by a return to a modified understanding of the 'whole' of the work. It embodies the belief that part and whole are interdependent and have some necessary organic relationship. (in Cuddon 405)

This account describes with a fair degree of accuracy how my sense of Johnson developed. The evolving outlines of the 'fuller picture' (what Maclean, using inverted commas, with good reason, calls the "'whole' meaning") no doubt involved a number of intuitive leaps, at any rate in the early stages, and, in so far, enacted the 'divinatory' aspect of the inquirer's onward movement through the circle[14].

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[14] The notion of "divination" as a key element in the theory of the hermeneutic circle was posited by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who also first propounded the theory itself. (For more on Schleiermacher's understanding of 'divination' v. Spitzer op. cit. 33). No theorist of the hermeneutic circle views its 'divinatory' aspect as a licence to launch out on flights of fancy, speculative sprees or impressionistic joy-rides. Heidegger, for example, warns that "our first, last and constant task is never to allow our fore-having ["Vorhabe" = 'that which we have in advance' (and which provides both the impetus and the context for 'divinatory' activity)]...to be presented to us byfancies and popular conceptions" (in Mueller-Vollmer 226). The theory of the hermeneutic circle underwrites the notion, one might say, of <u>disciplined</u> divination.

For Heidegger a 'divination' of the 'whole' occurs as early as the moment of first encounter with any of its parts - or, indeed, even earlier since divinatory activity is already present in the "undiscussed assumption[s]" (in Mueller-Vollmer 223) of the person who is about to perform an interpretative act. This standpoint makes it clear why Heidegger insists, first, that interpretation is always grounded in an "horizon of preunderstanding" (ibid. 35) and, second, that, contrary to "the dream of Cartesian 'First Philosophy'", there is no such thing as "presuppositionless knowledge" (Hoy 3-4). "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us", is how Heidegger puts it (in Mueller-Vollmer 223). The principal 'doctrinal' consequent flowing from Heidegger's theoretical position is embodied in the following dictum-like statement which contains the gist of his understanding of the hermeneutic circle: "Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding must already have understood what is to be interpreted" (ibid. 225). If by the word "understood" we comprehend something like 'grasp intuitively', then this statement, viewed against the backdrop sketched in above, appears intelligible and consistent, though out of context it may

well strike one as wilfully paradoxical and perversely circular. Only too aware of how susceptible his theory was to the charge of having fallen victim to a 'vicious circle' logic, Heidegger was at some pains to counter pre-emptively this imputation:

> But if we see this circle as a vicious one and look out for ways of avoiding it, even if we just 'sense' it as an inevitable imperfection, then the act of understanding has been misunderstood from the ground up. ...What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding...is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. (in Mueller-Vollmer 225-226) [emphasis in original]

This 'primordial kind of knowing' has more to do with intuitive modes of apprehension than with anything resembling rational inquiry or 'objective' knowledge. Heidegger was as firm in denying that the hermeneutic circle could lead to objective knowledge in the human

sciences as he was in denying that it was merely a 'vicious circle' manoeuvre "assuming as a premise the conclusion to be proved" [petitio principii] (Lanham 51). Only given an inappropriate ideal of knowledge - that of objectivity - can the hermeneutic circle be viewed as vicious (Hoy 3).

I spoke earlier of one thing being 'indisputable' - namely, the impossibility of psychological stylistics ever being able to deliver watertight interpretations reposing upon objective knowledge. This impossibility can be both clarified and accounted for in terms of the theory of the hermeneutic circle. As psychological stylistics is an interpretative enterprise and as, according to the hermeneutic viewpoint, both the interpreter and what is to be interpreted are located within the circle, they are perforce inscribed within what Hans-Georg Gadamer, at one time Heidegger's student, terms a "situation"; and, says Gadamer, "[t]he very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it" (in Mueller-Vollmer 269). In point of fact, however, the same conclusion can be arrived at without the interposition of the concept of a 'situation': as long as the interpreter and the object of interpretation are jointly inscribed within the hermeneutic

circle, and as long as it remains impossible either to escape or to transcend it (and for man it does, though not for God, hence the perfection of divine knowledge), every interpretation will always to some extent be coloured by the interpreter's 'undiscussed assumptions' - and as long as that holds true (and in the human sciences it always will), the ideal of objective knowledge will never be more than just a beautiful pipe-dream, always alluring and always out of reach.

As for myself, I hope that the inquiry which follows will stay within the boundaries traced by Heidegger: while I cannot aspire to certainties or conclusive demonstrations, I may yet hope to avoid the trap of 'vicious circle' reasoning which, in investigations structured on psychocritical lines, ordinarily manifests itself as an attempt to explain "a linguistic fact by an assumed psychological process for which the only evidence is the fact to be explained" (in Spitzer op. cit. 19). There is in the end only one really effective way of avoiding this pitfall, and that is to adduce <u>many</u> linguistic facts; in other words, to adduce a great deal of evidence - enough, at any rate, to put one's psychological hypothesis pretty much beyond the reach of

refutation, or of easy refutation, anyhow. My endeavour to compass this objective is reflected in my leading so considerable a quantity of evidence in the chapter which follows; there is enough of it, I believe, to make the psychological hypothesis I have undertaken to defend in this study not easily susceptible of refutation. I can only hope that this is an opinion which other readers will be able to share.

Drawing now to the end of this chapter, I want to enlarge its focus somewhat so as bring Johnson himself more fully into the picture.

Richard Ohmann, in his article "Mentalism in the Study of Literary Language" (in Zale 188-212), to which I have already referred, draws a distinction which has been of capital importance in clarifying my understanding and shaping my interpretation of Johnson as a maker of distinctions. Ohmann distinguishes moves that result in preferred stylistic <u>formulations</u> from ones that result in preferred stylistic <u>arrangements</u> (199) [emphasis in original]. The latter involve "assembling and relating [chiefly syntactic] structures" (idem), as with Saul Bellow's idiosyncratic predilection for post-nominal modifiers (this move corresponding to Milic's "stylistic

options" which tend to manifest themselves "at the...syntactic level" - v. supra), whereas the former, operating at an altogether deeper level, embody "a tendency to formulate the basic structures of discourse in a certain manner" (idem). As an example of the former tendency, the more elemental one, Ohmann calls attention to Edward Gibbon's striking preference for constructions cast in the passive voice, a preference he illustrates through analysis of a passage taken from Chapter 15 of the Decline and Fall. His conclusion at the end of the analysis is that Gibbon's "intricate embedding of passives was an unwilled accomplishment of his stylistic intuition" (195). As for the larger mental "impulse" (194) of which the historian's 'stylistic intuition' privileging the passive voice is but the symptom, Ohmann sees that in terms of habits of mind Gibbon cultivated in response to the particular demands of his discipline and calling:

> ...the passive answers well to a preference for objectivity and distance. By allowing human agency to recede into an obscure limbo, Gibbon locates the events of Roman history in a neutral framework of plain fact, mere occurrence, and absolves himself from a potentially sentimental

> attachment to the participants. "Just representations of general nature": the neo-classical slogan is Johnson's, but the goal informs the passage at hand, and Gibbon's history at large, even more pervasively than it does Johnson's work. The passive voice implements it here in a rather concrete way. (194)

It is my contention that Johnson's distinction-making, which is so pervasive in his discourse both written and spoken as to bear all the hallmarks of an unconscious and involuntary activity (an 'unwilled accomplishment', to use Ohmann's terminology), has to be viewed, like Gibbon's prepossesssion in favour of passive constructions, as operating at the level rather of 'preferred formulations' than of 'preferred arrangements'. Hence, just as Gibbon's pull towards passives is at once the reflection and enactment of his historian's mindset, so Johnson's distinction-making drive is at once the mirror, the impress, the enactment, the 'staging', indeed, of an altogether elemental aspect of his psychic constitution, its analytic, differentiating, bifurcating bent. Simply put, Johnson had, it seems to me, a distinction-making

mind; that was its character - or a large part of it. I visualize it as a kind of distinction-making factory, a machine programmed to generate distinctions. Whether it was built like that to begin with or trained to operate that way, who can say? Perhaps it was these two factors working in combination that made it what it was. At any rate, I believe this aspect of his psychic organization was a good deal more elemental than the aspect (whatever it was) that generated the stylistic peculiarities - the inverted periods, the fondness for personification and parallelism - which have for so long been thought of as most truly characteristic of the 'Johnsonian' manner. In my view these 'quintessentially Johnsonian' style-markers are to be located at the more superficial level of preferred stylistic and syntactic arrangements rather than at the more fundamental one of "preferred formulations". In point of fact, the verbal formations by way of which Johnson's innumerable distinctions are mediated are syntactically and stylistically very diverse; the feature they have in common is that they are all vehicles for distinction-making - which again suggests that his distinction-making drive was 'bedrock', the 'bottom line'. That he may have been momentarily aware of this drive, that

he may have caught a glimpse of its commanding importance in the organization of his psyche, is hinted at by these remarks in the "Preface" to his Dictionary of the English Language:

> The nice and subtle ramifications of meaning were not easily avoided by a mind intent upon accuracy, and convinced of the necessity of disentangling combinations, and separating similitudes. (in Bronson 253).

CHAPTER TWO

MINDMAPPING: VIEWS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON'S MIND OVER TWO AND A HALF CENTURIES

Samuel Johnson died in London on the thirteenth December 1784. Before the month was out Thomas Tyers had published his "Biographical Sketch of Dr. Samuel Johnson" in the Gentleman's Magazine. Tyers was quick off the mark, and so his piece represented the proemial eddy of what was soon to become a flood of memoirs, sketches, recollections, anecdotes and full-dress biographies of the dead Sage. The public appetite for information about a man who had become a national institution in his own lifetime seemed to be insatiable and, indeed, to grow by what it fed on. So those who sought to satisfy it were, in a sense, 'on to a good thing': career and commercial motives could never have been entirely absent from their calculations[1].

The legend of Johnson's august presence, commanding personality and prodigious intellect, of his ordinary

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[1] Of Tyers Boswell rather acidly remarks that he was "one among the various persons ambitious of appending their names to that of my illustrious friend" (Life 960).

humanity conjoined with an extraordinary larger-than-lifeness were not the only factors prompting such widespread curiosity about him among the educated eighteenth-century public. One has also to bring into the picture the growing interest, observable right through the century, in psychological speculation, investigation and analysis. This was a phenomenon that undoubtedly added to the incentive to 'rubberneck' Johnson, the more so considering his well-remembered 'oddities'; that is, his compulsive behaviour as manifested in an entire repertoire of bizarre tics and gestures. Johnson himself indirectly calls attention to the epoch's increased interest in matters psychological when he implicitly installs it as the standard by which the dearth of psychological understanding in Shakespeare's day is judged and shown up:

> Speculation had not yet attempted to analyse the mind, to trace the passions to their sources, to unfold the seminal principles of vice and virtue, or sound the depths of the heart for the motives of action. All those enquiries, which from that time that human nature became the fashionable study, have been made sometimes with nice discernment, but often with idle subtilty,

> were yet unattempted. The tales, with which the infancy of learning was satisfied, exhibited only the superficial appearances of action, related the events but omitted the causes, and were formed for such as delighted in wonders rather than in truth. Mankind was not then to be studied in the closet. ("Preface" to Shakespeare, in Bronson 286)

Taking up the cue, Kenneth MacLean points out that in Hume's view the "closet study of man and his mind was a particularly Eighteenth-Century and peculiarly English investigation, succeeding in point of time the Seventeenth Century's investigations of the physical world by Bacon and his contemporaries" (13).

Given this backdrop, it comes as no surprise to discover that the eighteenth century is rich in observation and comment on Johnson's mind and character, some of it recorded while he was alive and therefore not intended for publication (not immediate publication, anyhow), some of it recorded and/or published after his death. Most of the eighteenth-century comment documents the impressions of people who actually knew him; of these fewer would have had a commercial motive for committing their observations to

writing than would have been prompted by a simple desire to record an insight or judgment about the build or workings of a mind by which they had been deeply impressed (in some cases, overwhelmed). For Boswell, of course, the recording of such impressions became, in time, part of a monumental memorializing project.

As one moves towards the nineteenth century, with the Romantic currents now gaining the ascendancy, the picture changes, partly because hardly any of the nineteenth-century commentators actually knew Johnson, and so could not have been personally awed by him; but mostly because so much of what Johnson stood for was obnoxious to the Romantic creed. At the same time, however, he bulked large - too large to be disregarded or dismissed. He accordingly represented a major obstacle to the Romantic advance, one which it would require a concerted effort to clear out of the way. The major Romantic authors and critics realized, writes James T Boulton, that Johnson "epitomized supremely the assumptions about 'man, nature, and human life' which had to be rejected if their own convictions were to prevail. ...Johnson provided a sacrificial victim essential to the success of the literary and moral revolution" (8-9). So the reception he meets with from the Romantic writers

and critics is in general a disparaging and hostile one. But once the campaign of disparagement had done its work, in other words, once he had been toppled from his pedestal, the rest of the century was notable for a growing indifference to him (Boulton 34); his works dropped into obscurity and he himself survived in a new incarnation as the 'character' (meaning, the oddity) immortalized by Boswell in his biography[2].

Just as the nineteenth century viewed Johnson through the lens of its particular prepossessions and aspirations and, viewing him thus, didn't much like what it saw, so the twentieth has viewed him through the lens of its particular interests and 'agenda' and, viewing him thus, has been, in contrast to the preceding century, more than anything else intrigued by what has met its gaze. How so? Because the twentieth century has been the century of psychological and psychoanalytical ferment and progress, a century of intensive research, ceaseless experiment, vigorous debate and endless theorizing; and it is through the lens of those researches and theories that the great majority of

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[2] Cf. Thomas Carlyle, writing in 1832: "...already, indeed, they [Johnson's writings] are becoming obsolete for this generation; and for some future generation may be valuable chiefly as Prolegomena and expository Scholia to this Johnsoniad of Boswell [meaning the Life]" (in Boulton 432).

commentators with an interest in saying something about Johnson's mental (and emotional) character have viewed it. Many of the psychologizing critics, as one may fairly describe them, have a wide-ranging and, in some instances, a professional acquaintance with psychology and psychoanalysis - if not in all cases with Johnson himself (meaning his life, opinions, writings and setting - what I shall frequently be referring to, using a kind of shorthand, as the 'larger picture'). Upon critics of such a tendency, even upon those little acquainted with the 'larger picture' (or upon them most of all, perhaps), Samuel Johnson's mind and personality have exercised an irresistible fascination as a kind of psychologizer's El Dorado. Those strange compulsive gestures, the overblown sense of guilt, the consuming fear of insanity, solitariness and death - these and other intriguing characteristics, to be discussed in more detail below, have beckoned powerfully in our century to commentators of a psychologizing bent - and of these there have been, and are, a good number. Thanks to the energy with which they have responded to the invitation to psychologize or psychoanalyse Johnson[3], any twentieth-century account of

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[3] My reason for differentiating between 'psychologize' and 'psychoanalyse' is that the latter term gestures towards psychological

his mind which, in seeking to explain his fears, singularities or melancholia, ignores or slights the psychological 'angle' - as does Christopher Hollis's judgment (1928) that "[h]is oddities...were caused...by some physical affliction" (17) - risks looking pitifully naive and hopelessly out of date.

In taking their 'soundings' of Johnson's mind, the psychologizing investigators' aim is always to produce an interpretation, that is, an explanation of his mental character (or part of it) that is given coherence by being developed within the context of an organizing concept or theory. In evolving their interpretations some of the psychologizing critics allow the data to gesture to the kind of theory that looks most appropriate; and the theory, in being brought to bear on them, remains sensitive to their 'vibrations'; others, however, spurred on by a psychologizing enthusiasm on the one hand unchecked by good sense and on the other helped along by their ignorance of the 'larger picture', force the data to fit the straitjacket of a pet theory looking for something to attach itself to. But these critics, no less than their colleagues in the opposing camp, are intent upon producing

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theories of a peculiarly Freudian cast, while the former has a more general application.

an interpretation.

There are a number of reasons for my insisting as I do on this point of the psychologizing commentators' drive to generate interpretations. The first is that it is a tendency which stands in marked contrast to the attitude and practice of their eighteenth-century predecessors (and, to a less degree, of their nineteenth-century ones). The observations of the eighteenth-century commentators on the quality and workings of Johnson's mind invariably take the form of detached impressions and isolated insights; their impulse is rather to remark a given attribute than to seek to account for it. Nor do they regard it as any part of their aim to develop interpretations of commanding explanatory power and inclusive scope. They were, after all, intelligent laymen whose interest in psychological questions was no greater than that of the age in general (though the age in general, as I noted above, manifested a growing interest in psychological questions). Still, the eighteenth-century commentators were laymen, unlike their twentieth-century counterparts of a psychologizing tendency who are often professional critics with a particular and sometimes a specialized interest in psychological matters. A second point is that the psychologizing interpretations

of our century, whether strong or weak, persuasive or forced, have yet been numerous enough, and suggestive or provocative enough, to have contributed not a little, in my view, to the discernible revival of interest in Johnson and his writings (as distinct from just his allegedly 'oddball' personality) within the last fifty years or so. Finally, thanks in no small measure to the interpretative input of the psychologizing critics of this century, there exist plausible grounds for advancing the generalization that while the eighteenth century was concerned chiefly to exhibit Johnson, and the nineteenth chiefly to dethrone him, the twentieth has been much more interested in interpreting him.

In presenting the above synopsis of the ways in which Johnson's mind has been viewed over two and a half centuries, and of the forces which have caused those ways of seeing to change from century to century, my principal objective has been to construct a backdrop against which my own view of the 'set' and workings of his mind may be projected. The sketch given above, and its detailed fleshing-out which now follows, are intended to provide a contextual frame into which my own inquiry may be inserted and with reference to which it may be evaluated. I may add

that the particular contextualizing paradigm I have chosen (that is, a critical-historical survey of views of Johnson's mind over the past 250 years) seems to me to be by far the most appropriate one among those 'on offer'[4], as bearing most directly upon my own inquiry which likewise posits a view of Johnson's mind - and which, when projected against the backdrop I am about to construct, will properly be perceived as taking its place at, or towards, the end of a long line of estimates and appraisals of the Johnsonian psyche.

In trying to deal manageably with the panorama of two and a half centuries of views and comment on Johnson's mind, I propose to proceed century by century. This choice of method is due to the lucky accident that the major shifts in perspective happened more or less to coincide with the arrival of the new century, meaning the nineteenth and then the twentieth. My inquiry begins, however, with an analysis of eighteenth-century views of Johnson's mind, all of them dating from its latter half.

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[4] Other contextualizing paradigms 'on offer' included viewing Johnson in relation to the the "cultural politics" of his age (as the historian JCD Clark has done in his recent(1994) book), or in relation to Enlightenment thought, or in relation to the political currents and affiliations of the epoch (as Donald J Greene did more than thirty years ago in The Politics of Samuel Johnson). It is, however, obvious that none of these contextualizing frames is nearly as relevant to my study, given its particular orientation, as the one I have chosen.

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Eighteenth-century appraisals of Johnson's mind sort themselves out initially into two basic divisions of unequal size. The larger by far consists of views of Johnson's psychical make-up that are specific, definite and informative in character; at issue here is not the substance (or subject-matter) of the attribute remarked but simply the degree of specifity and informativeness of the reference. The other, smaller division is made up of observations of a general, unspecific cast whose purpose is less to say something pertinent and informative about Johnson's psyche than to imply something about the attitude of the commentator. In other words, what we have to do with here is a use of language that is not so much 'descriptive' (= informative) as in an indeterminate kind of way expressive or symptomatic of the user's attitude. To be sure, the distinction between these two kinds of language-use is by no means clear-cut; it is much more a matter of shading and gradation. But, granting that, there still comes a point at which it is possible to say that the shading of a given specimen of discourse is predominantly descriptive or, alternatively, is predominantly

'attitudinal'[5].

The temptation to make a kind of uninformative noise simply in order to signal an attitude was one, as we might expect, that was pretty well confined to those commentators who were actually acquainted with Johnson, who registered the impact of the living personality and who witnessed the majestic intellect in action. It is therefore hardly surprising that the attitude signalled by them when they slip into the attitudinal mode is a uniformly admiring one. But once this generation of commentators dies out, so too does the phenomenon of a markedly attitudinal use of language in the characterization of Johnson's mental attributes. It is accordingly a phenomenon that does not survive the close of the century. There is no call

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[5] The distinction I am here venturing more or less corresponds to the fundamental distinction linguisticians draw between the 'descriptive' (also called the 'referential' or 'propositional') and the 'attitudinal' (also known as the 'expressive' or 'symptomatic') uses of language (v. Lyons 50-52).

The handling of language in such a way as to bring to light an attitude (i.e. the 'attitudinal' 'expressive' or 'symptomatic' use of language) is placed by R A Waldron under a head to which he gives the name 'evaluative': "An evaluative criterion is one by which the referent is placed on a scale of approval and disapproval" (89). Waldron proceeds to exemplify: "The verbs **butcher, mutilate...giggle, gloat**... all imply disapproval of the actions they designate" (idem). The point I am concerned to make in this context is that the instances of 'evaluative' language-use which I bring forward below have, it seems to me, a higher 'attitudinal' colouring and a lower informative-propositional one than is true of any of the examples Waldron appeals to; in other words, I think 'butcher', 'mutilate', 'giggle' and 'gloat' all possess a greater 'descriptive' and hence a more attenuated 'attitudinal' value than do any of the terms I bring under inspection below.

therefore to divide the views on Johnson's psyche which date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into the two basic divisions that are indicated for those of the eighteenth. In the two latter centuries the verdicts offered, whether favourable or not, at least are not just attitudinal 'noises'; their thrust is discernibly in the direction of specificity and informativeness.

It is time to turn from exposition to examples. Boswell is clearly being 'attitudinal' when he uses, repeatedly, the notably unspecific epithet "great" to characterize Johnson's mind: "...a great mind like his..." (Life 94); "...so great a mind as his..." (Hebrides Journal 218); "To apply his great mind to minute particulars, is wrong" (ibid. 239). Situated along the same trajectory, so to speak, are Mrs Thrale's commendation of the "uniformly great" character of Johnson's mind (in Ingrams 111), Joseph Towers's reference to his "great intellectual powers" (in Boulton 379), Dr Brocklesby, Johnson's physician's, praise for his "extraordinary talents of mind" (in Waingrow xli), a formulation paralleled by Boswell's "those extraordinary powers of mind" (Life 34), and by the 'Swan of Lichfield', Anna Seward's allusion to the "great powers of his mind" (in Boulton 413). Seward, in fact, in

a kind of 'give-away', prefaces her mention of those 'great powers' with an avowal of her admiration for them.

When we turn to the judgments on Johnson's mind which are specific in their purport and informative in their bearings[6], we find that the traits singled out for remark can be grouped into seven categories which, while they are certainly distinguishable one from the other, are nonetheless sufficiently inter-related to overlap to a discernible degree. I shall first designate these categories by means of brief descriptive titles, after which I shall proceed to flesh them out by bringing to bear a rather considerable body of evidence.

The seven categories are these:

1. Johnson's remarkable memory

2. The strength, vigour and power of his intellect and understanding

3. His logical precision and formidable powers of reasoning and argument

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[6] This is not to suggest, of course, that these judgments are not, at some level, suggestive of the commentator's attitude (at some level I daresay all language-use is suggestive of the user's attitude; even the seemingly most 'propositional' specimen of discourse could be said to imply an attitude - if it be only that of impersonality). But the point is that they are not primarily attitudinal. Which is to say (remembering that in my adaptation of the concept of 'attitudinal' the operative yardstick is the degree of specificity and informativeness) that the judgments I am about to consider are not vague or uninformative enough to be classed as 'primarily attitudinal'.

4. The facility, readiness and promptitude of his mind; and his fertility of fancy (under which head I include the attributes of imagination and originality)

5. His quickness and brilliancy of wit

6. The comprehensiveness of his mind; the diversity and breadth of his information and learning

7. His perspicacity, acuteness, and accuracy of discernment and judgment.

I propose now to consider each of these categories in turn.

Johnson's memory

All the commentators are at one in giving almost awed recognition to Johnson's extraordinary powers - and feats - of memory. As all but one of those whose impressions I shall be citing were acquainted with him, and so would have had the opportunity of personally witnessing these feats, it is hardly surprising that a note of wonderment tinges some of the accounts: Boswell writes that for "the power of his memory...he was all his life eminent to a degree almost incredible" (Life 30); Sir John Hawkins affirms that "whatever he read, became his own forever" (10), and then, backing up this claim with a personal testimony, he adds:

"I have heard him repeat, with scarce a mistake of a word, passages from favourite authors, of three or four octavo pages in length" (idem). Arthur Murphy declares that "Wonders are told of his memory, and, indeed, all who knew him late in life can witness that he retained that faculty in the greatest vigour" (in Hill I 363). Pitched in a more sober register are the tributes to Johnson's "remarkably retentive memory" (Towers in Boulton 380), to his "uncommonly retentive memory for every thing that appear'd to him worthy of observation" (Miss Reynolds in Hill II 252); and, finally, to a faculty of memory "so retentive...that he could always recover whatever he lent" to it (Tyers in Hill II 364).

The strength, vigour and power of Johnson's intellect and understanding

Mustered under this head are judgments of the following tenor: Johnson's is "a mind naturally vigorous" (Murphy in Hill I 375); though in poor health and aged 71, "his mind has lost nothing of its vigour" (Hannah More in Hill II 188). For his part, Boswell repeatedly insists on Johnson's "intellectual vigour" (Life 29) and "vigorous mind" (ibid. 870) - as he does on his "strength

of...understanding" (ibid. 29), "strength of thought" (Hebrides Journal 365) and "intellectual strength and dexterity" (Life 1402)[7]. Robert Potter commends his "vigorous and manly understanding" (as a prelude, however, to animadversions upon his allegedly attenuated sensibility) (in Boulton 295); and Edmond Malone, in a near-identical formulation, spotlights his "vigorous and comprehensive understanding" (in Bate (1975) 396). Under this head may also be included references to his uncommon inquisitiveness (Life 35), his "ardour of...curiosity" (ibid. 29) being often expressed as a desire "of seeing every thing that was extraordinary in art or nature" (Tyers in Hill II 376).

Johnson's logical precision and powers of reasoning and argument

For Arthur Murphy Johnson's powers as a logician were

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[7] Cognizant of Boswell's numerous references to Johnson's intellectual distinction (those given above being but a sampling), Marshall Waingrow observes that "No trait of Johnson's receives more emphasis in the biography than his intellectual powers...[His] pre-eminence of mind is insisted upon throughout" (xlv-xlvi). That such should be the case is no accident: in undertaking the writing of the Life, Boswell after all gave himself a brief which reflected a new aspiration in biographical endeavour - that of "throw[ing] light on the progress of his [subject's] mind" (Life 29). His consciousness of attempting something new in biographical composition played no small part in encouraging him to stick at it and to see the immense project through to completion.

too striking to have been acquired; they had to be innate, 'in the genes': "[He] was born a logician...In consequence of his skill in that art, he loved argumentation. ...A fallacy could not stand before him: it was sure to be refuted by strength of reasoning, and a precision both in idea and expression almost unequalled" (in Hill I 452). Boswell, too, traces a cause-effect relationship between Johnson's logical powers and his pre-eminence in argument: "In him were united a most logical head with a most fertile imagination, which gave him an extraordinary advantage in arguing: for he could reason close or wide, as he saw best for the moment" (Life 1402). Hawkins implies a similar link by placing Johnson's distinction as a logician in apposition with his argumentative skills: "With respect to logical precision and strength of argument, [these] tracts [testifying to his "skill in political controversy"] defy all comparison" (220). None of the other commentators, however, posits a link between Johnson's logical and argumentative powers; they are noted independently of each other. So, for example, he is characterized as a "Colossus in argument" (Anon. in Boulton 230), a tribute the more telling for being bestowed by a professed opponent to his views. Another anti-Johnsonian snapper is Horace Walpole

who pays this cutting backhanded compliment to his reasoning abilities: "he is ...a just reasoner - I mean when Prejudice, bigotry, and arrogance do not cloud or debase his Logic" (in Boulton 325). Over against the barbed comment, one may set a larger number of 'straight', unironic ones: "He was very dextrous at argumentation; and, when his reasonings were not solid, they were at least artful and plausible" (Towers in Boulton 380). Hawkins notes Johnson's superior "power of reasoning" (110), and Boswell his delight in exercising it: "[his] supreme enjoyment was the exercise of his reason" (Life 49)[8]. Given that reason for Johnson was nothing if not an active

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[8] It bears mentioning that Johnson's reasoning powers, working in conjunction with his astounding memory, enabled him to fit together whole blocks of argument in his head before setting them down, complete and indefectible, on paper. This was not a talent intended for display - just something to show off with; rather, it fulfilled a necessary pragmatic function because, compensating for his bad eyesight, it constituted the key both to his method and his rapidity of composition. This was something first remarked by Arthur Murphy in his Essay of 1792:

> Johnson has observed that there are different methods of composition. Virgil was used to pour out a great number of verses in the morning, and pass the day in retrenching the exuberances, and correcting inaccuracies; and it was Pope's custom to write his first thoughts in his first words, and gradually to amplify, decorate, rectify, and refine them. Others employ at once memory and invention, and, with little intermediate use of the pen, form and polish large masses by continued meditation, and write their productions only, when, in their opinion, they have completed them. This last was Johnson's method. He never took his pen in hand till he had weighed well his subject, and grasped in his mind the sentiments, the train of argument, and the arrangement of the whole. ...This may account for that rapidity with which, in general, he dispatched his sheets to the press, without being at the trouble of a fair copy. (in Hill I 425-26)

force animating the whole fabric of his thinking and vivifying all his argumentative performances, his particular use of it provides a paradigmatic illustration of Ernst Cassirer's theory regarding the changed role and status of reason in the eighteenth century. Declares Cassirer:

> Here...is evident a characteristic change of meaning in the concept of reason as compared with seventeenth century usage. In the great metaphysical systems of that century - those of Descartes and Malebranche, of Spinoza and Leibniz - reason is the realm of the "eternal verities", of those truths held in common by the human and the divine mind. What we know through reason, we therefore behold "in God". Every act of reason means participation in the divine nature... The eighteenth century takes reason in a different...sense. It is no longer the sum total of "innate ideas" given prior to all experience, which reveal the absolute essence of things. Reason is now looked upon rather as an acquisition than as a heritage. It is not the treasury of the mind in which the truth like a

> minted coin lies stored; it is rather the original intellectual force which guides the discovery and determination of truth. ...The whole eighteenth century understands reason in this sense; not as a sound body of knowledge, principles, and truths, but as a kind of energy, a force which is fully comprehensible only in its agency and effects. (13)

The facility, readiness and promptitude of Johnson's mind, including his "fertility of fancy"

What we meet with in this category are observations such as Richard Cumberland's to the effect that among "the properties in him which I contemplated with the most admiration" was "the readiness with which he could turn to any article that he wanted to make present use of" (in Hill II 77). Seconding Cumberland, Sir Joshua Reynolds declares that "among...the most distinguished" of Johnson's qualities "was his possessing a mind which was...always ready for use" (in Hill II 220). One of the very few eighteenth-century commentators to annex to his specification of a Johnsonian mental trait an explanation for it, Reynolds ventures the opinion that his friend's

"facility...of mind" was referable to his "living...so much in company, more perhaps than any other studious man whatever" (ibid. 221). Moving in the same 'orbit' as the allusions to Johnson's 'facility' are those to his 'promptitude' of mind. Once again there is the testimony of Reynolds: "Sir Joshua observed to me the extraordinary promptitude with which Johnson flew upon an argument" (Life 628). Earlier in the Life Boswell himself spotlights the same trait: "...by reading and meditation, and a very close inspection of life, he had accumulated a great fund of miscellaneous knowledge, which, by a peculiar promptitude of mind, was ever ready at his call" (145). The Reverend William Shaw makes reference to Johnson's "promptitude of invention" (in Sherbo 41) - and this submission serves as a logical corridor to a miscellany of allusions to the fertility of his fancy and/or imagination. Both Boswell and Richard Cumberland employ the identical phrase "fertility of fancy", Boswell in the Life (155), Cumberland in his Memoirs. As Cumberland's anecdotal style is so lively, I judge it permissible (on the grounds of literature's pleasure-giving function) to cite a bit of the text on either side of the reference to "fertility of fancy":

> Anecdotes of times past, scenes of his own life, and characters of humourists, enthusiasts, crack-brained projectors and a variety of strange beings, that he had chanced upon, when detailed by him at length, and garnished with those episodical remarks...which he would throw in with infinite fertility of fancy, were a treat, which though not always to be purchased by five and twenty cups of tea [the allusion is to Johnson's insuperable addiction to tea-drinking], I have often had the happiness to enjoy for less than half the number. (in Hill II 76)

Going hand in hand with the references to Johnson's fertility of fancy are those to his imagination and originality. Towers and Shaw both underline the vigour of his imagination: "His powers of imagination were vigorous and active" (Shaw in Sherbo 38); "his imagination was uncommonly vigorous" (Towers in Boulton 380). Sir John Hawkins, focussing rather on fertility than on vigour, speaks of "an imagination that was ever teeming with new ideas" (111). Then we encounter a cluster of pronouncements whose modelling mirrors the eighteenth-

century practice (which really was more like a habit) of juxtaposing the imagination/fancy (interchangeable terms until Coleridge decoupled them in the Biographia) with judgment and/or reason. Here are a couple of examples: writing in the Gentleman's Magazine, a pseudonymous 'Remembrancer' pays tribute to the pseudonymous 'Rambler' as a "writer blessed with a vigorous imagination, under the restraint of a classical judgment" (in Boulton 63). Taking precisely the opposite view, but still operating within the imagination-reason paradigm, Thomas Tyers is of the mind that Johnson's "imagination often appeared to be too mighty for the control of his reason" (in Hill II 339), echoing in these words the sentiment voiced by his mouthpiece, Imlac, in the forty-fourth chapter of Rasselas (the one entitled "The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination") to the effect that "[t]here is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason" (in Bronson 693). Mrs Thrale, fashioning a juxtaposition in which Imagination is played off against Passion, asserts, rather murkily in my view, that "Johnson was more a Man of Imagination than Passion" (in Ingrams 103). Recognizing as we now do the intimate connection subsisting between the imaginative faculty and the power of framing poetical images, we must

give its due to Boswell's perception that his friend's "mind was so full of imagery, that he might have been perpetually a poet" (Life 1401).

A number of commentators remark Johnson's originality. Murphy writes that "though he was never tainted, like many modern wits, with the ambition of shining in paradox, he may be fairly called an ORIGINAL THINKER" (in Hill I 467) [emphasis in original]. In a more fulsome vein, the Reverend Shaw (who at other times can be pretty malicious) observes that the "genius of Johnson...abounded with originality on every subject which occupied his attention" (in Sherbo 53), while Joseph Towers notes the "great originality which sometimes appeared in his conceptions" (in Boulton 380).

It is doutful that any of these critics can have meant by 'originality' what the Romantic poets (or, for that matter, the 'poets of sensibility' of an earlier generation) understood by the term; namely, an almost visionary leap of the creative intelligence as it reaches for 'things never before imagined or thought upon'. (On the other hand, it is evident from the phrasing of Murphy's judgment, quoted above, that in 1792, when he published his Essay, there existed a current of opinion which tended to

equate originality with the kind of mental agility productive of those ingenious juxtapositions and verbal 'telescopings' that lie at the heart of the ability to 'shine in paradox'). We approach an understanding of what 'originality' gestured to in Johnson's day - and thus what the critics cited above meant by the term when using it with reference to him - by considering Hannah More's comment that in the Sage's presence one could always bank on "hearing...old [ideas] expressed in an original manner" (in Hill II 188-89). Running parallel to More's statement is that of Tyers who reports that Johnson "said the most common things in the newest manner" (ibid. 366). It would seem, therefore, that what those critics who praise Johnson for his 'originality' had in mind was something very close to the standpoint enshrined in the celebrated lines of the Essay on Criticism:

> True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;
> Something whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind.[9]

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[9] The account of 'originality' offered above seems to share a good deal of common ground with Johnson's view of Imagination as a faculty that "selects ideas from the treasures of remembrance, and produces novelty only by varied combinations" (Idler 44, II 137) - a view that lies at some considerable remove from the Romantic conception of Imagination as "a source of transcendental knowledge...without recourse to either experience or logic" (Krutch 286-87), or as "the unique means by which

(ll. 297-300)

Johnson's "brilliancy of wit"

Considering the way Pope in the Essay on Criticism shimmies through at least seven different senses of the word 'wit' (which he uses no fewer than forty seven times in the poem - West 48), one wonders what Johnson's contemporaries could have had in mind when they praised him for this quality. Well, the conception of 'wit' which the citations given below appear to bear out puts a premium on such attributes as mental agility and liveliness of fancy, coming to expression not seldom in the form of deft and at times stinging repartee of the kind Johnson "never, in any situation, was at a loss for" (Boswell, Hebrides Journal 390). At the same time, though, the examples I bring forward also glance at two of the truly foundational senses of the term: namely, wit as "the perception of resemblances which are neither too obvious nor too recondite" (West 50); and wit as "that quality of speech or writing which

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we can think and grasp as a unity that which is contradictory" (F W Schelling in Hirsch (1960) 101). Johnson's understanding of Imagination appears in fact to hark back to Locke - to his notion of "complex ideas" being simply combinations and/or variations of those foundational conceptual building-blocks, originating in sensation or reflection, to which he gives the name "simple ideas" (v. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, especially Chapter XII entitled "Of Complex Ideas").

consists in the apt association of thought and expression, calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness" (O.E.D).

Turning to the evidence, one may point to Boswell's affirmation of "that quickness of wit for which [Johnson] was so remarkable" (Life 277). The following incident, in bearing out Boswell's verdict, provides an opportunity for its documenter, Miss Reynolds, to pay tribute to the "ready wit" of his 'illustrious friend':

> [A] lady, one evening,...was called upon after supper for her Toast...she was desired to give the ugliest man she knew; and she immediately named Dr. Goldsmith. On which a lady on the other side of the Table rose up and reach'd across to shake hands with her, expressing some desire of being better acquainted with her, it being the first time they had met; on which Dr. Johnson said, "Thus the Ancients, on the commencement of their Friendships, used to sacrifice a Beast betwixt them". (in Hill II 268)

Richard Cumberland speaks of Johnson's "brilliancy of... wit" (in Hill II 76), and William Shaw, in a

malicious back-handed compliment (which makes one suspect that he had personally experienced the sting of that 'wit'), writes: "To a mind thus manured in learning, science, and knowledge of the world, Johnson added such amplitude of wit as answered all the purposes of petulance, malignity, and amusement" (in Sherbo 54). On the other hand, when Lady Knight says admiringly of the Sage that "He was master of an infinite deal of wit", adding that it "proceeded from depth of thought" (in Hill II 176), she would seem to be gesturing towards an archaic sense of the term signifying "the faculty of thinking and reasoning in general" (O.E.D); or perhaps even towards an obsolete (or soon to be obsolete) sense, that of "wisdom, good judgment" (idem).

The comprehensiveness of Johnson's mind; the diversity and breadth of his information and learning

Johnson was born into the world with a prodigious mental capacity. His mind was an immense container waiting to be filled, and fill it he did - with a vast and diverse store of information and learning. Richard Cumberland recalls how profoundly his admiration was stirred by the "expanse of matter, which Johnson had found room for in his

intellectual storehouse" (in Hill II 77). The astonishing feat of engrossment whereby Johnson really did manage to turn himself into a walking encyclopaedia is what stands behind the often awed tone informing his contemporaries' references to the comprehensiveness, reach and sweep of his mind. "His Mind was so Comprehensive that no Language but his own could have express'd its Contents", says Mrs Thrale (in Ingrams 69). Echoing this perception, Boswell writes that "Johnson's comprehension of mind was the mould for his language" (Life 158-59). The comprehensiveness of mind, together with the encyclopaedic learning, had by-products which did not go unnoticed by the eighteenth-century commentators. One was the ability to "transfer his thoughts from one thing to another with the most accommodating facility" since "[n]o subject ever came amiss to him" (Tyers in Hill II 365). This aptitude was noticed by Fanny Burney too; her Diary for the year 1788 contains the following entry: "I could not help expressing my amazement [to Mrs Thrale] at his universal readiness upon all subjects" (15). A second by-product was the ability to think both laterally and globally - "to take measure of every intellectual object, and to see all around it" (Tyers in Hill II 371). This insight is echoed by Murphy who

writes that he "had what Locke calls a round-about view of his subject" (in Hill I 467). The Reverend Robert Burrowes, one of the most perspicacious of the eighteenth-century commentators, probes a little deeper than Tyers and Murphy and ventures an explanation of Johnson's ability to see things 'in the round': with a mind so comprehensive and so richly stocked, it was only natural that any idea which came into his head should trail a throng of affiliated ones: "[His] mind was so comprehensive," says Burrowes, "that no circumstance occurred to him unaccompanied by many others similar" (in Boulton 338).

Johnson's comprehensiveness of mind, "variety of information" (Hebrides Journal 307), and amplitude of learning evidently made such an impression on those who were oftenest in his company that they were left groping for analogies as the only adequate means of conveying their sense of admiration or, more correctly, awe. The analogy Boswell lights on is a classical one (which would surely have pleased its subject): "His mind resembled the vast amphitheatre, the Colisaeum at Rome" (Life 427); but I think Johnson would have been even more pleased by Mrs Thrale's splendid encomium built on a striking extended

metaphor[10]:

> The mind of Mr Johnson was indeed expanded beyond the common Limits of human Nature, & stored with such variety of Knowledge that I used to think it resembled a Royal Pleasure Ground, where every Tree of every Name and Nation, flourished in the full perfection of their Nature; & where tho' lofty Woods & falling Cataracts first caught the Eye, & fixed the Attention of Beholders, yet neither the trim Parterre, nor the pleasing Shrubbery; nor even the antiquated Evergreens were denied a Place in some fit Corner of the happy Valley. (in Ingrams 72)

Johnson's perspicacity, acuteness, and accuracy of discernment and judgment

Mustered under this head are tributes to Johnson's "acute discernment" (Murphy in Hill I 452), "accuracy of

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[10] In fact, we know that he was pleased by Mrs Thrale's portrait, because the day after composing it she showed him what she had written and made a note of his response:

> When I shewed him his Character next day - for he would see it; he said it was a very fine Piece of Writing; and that I had improved upon Young who he saw was my Model he said; for my Flattery was still stronger than his, & yet somehow or other less hyperbolical. (in Ingrams 72) [emphasis in original]

discernment" (Life 29), and "nicety of discernment" in which "none...exceeded him" (Burrowes in Boulton 339). Mrs Thrale's verdict, echoing Burrowes's, is that "no man so acutely discerned the reason of every fact, the motive of every action, the end of every design" (in Sherbo 139). Then there are the judgments which give pride of place to Johnson's discriminative powers: Sir Brooke Boothby calls attention to his "nicety of discrimination" (in Hill II 392), William Shaw to "a penetration...characteristically ...discriminating" (in Sherbo 26), and William Fitzthomas to his "discriminative judgment" (in Boulton 285). (Fitzthomas's praise is clearly rhetorical and tactical since it forms part of a little nosegay of compliments preceding reproof of Johnson for his allegedly unfair treatment of Gray in the Lives of the Poets. In 1781, when Fitzthomas wrote his piece, Johnson's reputation and authority were far too securely established to admit of 'full-frontal' deprecation, so it was necessary for Fitzthomas, before embarking on his critique, to pay the Sage his merited and expected due through the tactical deployment of a fitting number of lenitive compliments).

Focussing on Johnson's perspicacity are these pronouncements: "acuteness and penetration" (Hawkins 9),

"the most penetrating acuteness" (Burrowes in Boulton 332); and focussing on his nicety of judgment, these: "In judgment keen..." (Courtenay in Boulton 366), "accuracy of...judgment" (Steevens in Hill II 329), "penetrating judgment" (Hawkins 10)[11].

So much, then, for the character of Johnson's mind as perceived by an assortment of eighteenth-century commentators, the great majority of whom do no more, really, than single out for attention this or that isolated trait; there is very little sense that the attribute remarked might be linked to others, or might be in fact a manifestation of some more fundamental underlying characteristic; in short, there is very little sense that it might have a place in some larger pattern or form part of a more inclusive picture (or even, indeed, that there exists in the first place any such thing as a 'more inclusive picture'). Boswell, however, in marked contrast

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[11] I find it interesting that not one of these references to Johnson's discernment, intellectual penetration or discriminative power is ever linked, in a relationship either of cause or of effect, to his distinction-making bent or, at least, to his distinction-making praxis. The reason is, I suppose, that neither the bent nor the praxis ever received 'high-profile' treatment in the eighteenth century (or, for that matter, in the succeeding ones).

I may add, by the way, with respect to the question of the cause-effect relationship subsisting between Johnson's discriminative powers and his distinction-making bent, that in my view the bent has primacy, while the legendary powers of discernment and penetration are a consequence, as they are a manifestation, of it.

to almost all of his contemporaries, succeeds in taking stock of Johnson's mind from a more elevated point of vantage (undoubtedly a major reason for the superiority of his Life over the rival biographies it instantly eclipsed), and this enables him to appraise it in a manner at once more encompassing and more searching than would have been possible for them. Boswell's superiority comes out clearly in the following judgment drawn from the summarizing overview at the conclusion of the Life:

> [H]is superiority over other learned men consisted chiefly in what may be called the art of thinking, the art of using his mind; a certain continual power of seizing the useful substance of all that he knew, and exhibiting it in a clear and forcible manner; so that knowledge, which we often see to be no better than lumber in men of dull understanding, was, in him, true, evident, and actual wisdom. (Life 1400-01)

In its combination of inclusiveness and incisiveness this statement stands unrivalled among eighteenth-century appraisals of Johnson's mind.

In presenting my survey of those appraisals, I have

felt justified in offering as detailed an account as I have on the grounds that the eighteenth-century views possess particular interest and authority by reason of being, in the vast majority of cases, a record of the impressions and insights of commentators who were actually acquainted with Johnson, and who therefore would have had the opportunity of observing his mind in action and, indeed, of being awed, or provoked, or in some other way personally affected by its operations.

In surveying the corpus of eighteenth-century opinion on the character and workngs of the 'Great Cham's' mind, my modus operandi was dictated by the way in which the data naturally sorted themselves out into seven categories of more or less equal size; this made the choice of a sevenfold method of classification an obvious, indeed, an inevitable one. When one turns, however, to a consideration of the nineteenth and twentieth-century data, it becomes immediately evident that such a method would be quite out of place, for the following reason: while the nineteenth and twentieth-century views, when considered purely from the standpoint of their range, may cover just about as much ground as do the eighteenth-century ones, with respect to the number of different characteristics

reported on, when considered from the standpoint of their pattern of distribution, the nineteenth and twentieth-century data do not exhibit anything remotely comparable to the equality of spread that characterizes the eighteenth-century picture. In both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, most particularly in the early decades of the nineteenth and in the early and middle decades of the twentieth, one 'commanding impulse' quite overshadows all the others; that being so, it seems to me that no useful purpose would be served by bringing to bear on the data of these two epochs the elaborate machinery of a classificatory and compartmentalizing method. Accordingly, in my handling of the evidence brought forward from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, my procedure in each case will be to document first of all those views not subsumed under the 'commanding impulse', though without making any attempt to separate them into categories, and then to move on to a consideration of those which are. As for the 'commanding impulses' (as I call them) themselves, I have already had something to say on the subject in the synoptic overview presented at the beginning of this chapter, but it is as well to restate the gist of the argument: the commanding literary-cultural impulse of the

early nineteenth century was Romanticism, whose struggle for supremacy necessitated the clearing away of obstacles; being a major one, Johnson had perforce to be confronted; there was no way he could just be sidestepped; put in the dock, then, charged and tried "under a foreign code of conscience" (Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats") - though it would of course be unreasonable to blame his Romantic detractors for not judging him from a standpoint other than their own - he was duly found guilty of an assortment of literary-critical sins of omission and commission: defects of sympathy, sensibility and taste, as well as errors of judgment and perception. A commanding impulse of the early and middle decades of the twentieth century has been the drive, stimulated by the great advances made in the last hundred years or so in the areas of psychological and psychoanalytical theory and practice, to probe and lay bare the secrets of our psychical and instinctual life - and then to apply the insights gained to (among other things) works of literature and their authors. Appraised from the standpoint of this 'impulse', Johnson, for reasons outlined in the synoptic sketch given at the beginning of the chapter, has proved to be a source of inexhaustible interest, of fascination, indeed, for critics of a

psychologizing tendency - not to speak of yet others in whom what he has to offer has planted such a tendency where none existed before. It is not, I believe, too much to claim that this century's renewed interest in Johnson is in no small measure an outcome of the curiosity generated (and, on occasion, the provocation offered) by the writings of those critics who have been drawn to inspect, appraise, interpret (and reinterpret) his mind and personality from a psychological and/or psychoanalytical standpoint. So much by way of preamble; I now move on to an analysis of nineteenth-century views of Johnson's mind.

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Observations of the same tenor as those that provision the seven eighteenth-century categories are certainly to be found in the nineteenth, though very much more thinly spread. Thus we meet with the by now familiar tributes to Johnson's "strength of memory" (Croker's Boswell in Hill II 405), "breadth of information" (idem), "gigantic mind" (William Mudford in Boulton 75) and "uncommon penetration" (idem); there is acknowledgment of, and praise for, the "vigour and compass of [his] thought" (John Aikin in

Boulton 49), the "native vigour of [his] mind" (Mudford in Boulton 79), and the "vigour of his understanding" (Mackintosh in Boulton 350)[12].

The purely laudatory aspects of the nineteenth-century tributes to Johnson's mental powers are, however, the least interesting thing about them; much more so is a new 'strain' which now begins to seep into so many of them; this new strain is the note of reservation and demur. Remarkably few of the eighteenth-century tributes were counterbalanced by reservations or expressions of demur; they tended to be straightforward, robust declarations having their roots, for the most part, in an attitude of candid admiration[13]. But in the nineteenth century what is given with the one hand is all too often taken away by the

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[12] Among Johnson's small band of nineteenth-century partisans, Thomas Carlyle stands out for the warmth of his admiration; with respect to his estimate of Johnson's mind, his determinations are anything but half-hearted: Johnson had "the keenest [eye] for perspicacity and minute detail" (in Boulton 447), an "inward eye, all-penetrating, all-embracing" (ibid.434), a "sun-clear intellect" (444), a "mind earnest, deep...humane" (437). In expressing these sentiments is Carlyle in some degree simply permitting himself the harmless luxury of praising a man who no longer posed a threat to the dominance of the Romantic creed (in 1832, when these words were written, Johnson had been long dethroned)? Or is he indulging a taste for the heterodox? One never knows with Carlyle; there was a part of him that was heterodox on principle.

[13] The watering-down in the nineteenth century of the eighteenth-century commentators' general attitude of frank admiration for Johnson's mental endowments shows through tellingly in this passage from the pen of Sir James Mackintosh (1811): "Such is the character which may be bestowed on Johnson by those who feel a profound reverence for his virtues, and a respect approaching to admiration for his intellectual powers..." (in Boulton 354) [my emphasis].

other: repeatedly one comes upon praise that is immediately counterbalanced by the entering of a reservation (or countermanded by an expression of censure); in like manner, a familiar Johnsonian strength is remarked - but only in order to enforce the point that behind it there lurks a disabling, and hitherto unsuspected limitation. These are instances, then, of the critic's granting that which he is already preparing to take away (or water down) - and only <u>because</u> he is preparing so to do. Let me now turn to examples: the batch below consists of items whose general pattern is that of praise counterbalanced by reservation; this pattern takes two particularized forms: in the first an expression of praise is followed (in a few cases, preceded) by demur (that is, the registering of a scruple, a doubt, a mild objection or qualification); in the second it is followed by the specification of a negative quality of one kind or another. Of the items which follow, the first three exemplify demur, the others the noting of a negative quality:

> [Johnson's] remarks on life and manners are just and weighty, and show a philosophical mind, but not an original turn of thinking. (Mrs Barbauld in Boulton 153-54)

If we do not discover in his essays the genius which invents, we have a wonderful display of those powers of mind which...almost instantly strike conviction. (Alexander Chalmers in Boulton 84)

The great intellectual powers of Dr. Johnson, displayed in many of his works...have raised his reputation to high distinction, and impressed upon all his opinions a stamp of authority...without an examination into their intrinsic value. (Noah Webster in Boulton 126-27) [emphasis in original]

Johnson had a masculine understanding, clouded on important subjects by prejudice... (Mackintosh in Boulton 350)

Dr. Johnson was not an admirer of the simple in style or minute in description. Still, he was an acute, strong-minded man, and could see truth when it was presented to him, even through the mist of his prejudices and his foibles. (Hazlitt (1825) 198)

The judgments which Johnson passed on books...are the judgments of a strong but

enslaved understanding. (Macaulay II 554)

The characteristic peculiarity of his intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices[14]. (ibid. 550)

Now a couple of examples in which mention is made of a Johnsonian strength - but only in order to bring to light the unsuspected limitation lurking behind it:

He could discern clearly enough the folly and meanness of all bigotry except his own. (Macaulay II 552)

It is indeed surprizing, that the perspicuity of Johnson's mind, which could so readily detect the deviations of other poets, should have been incapable of correcting his own. (Mudford in Boulton 45)

Commenting on Boswell's biographical strategy in the Life, Marshall Waingrow writes that "Johnson's weaknesses...are methodically viewed under the aspect of his strengths (xlviii). Well, the evidence suggests that the impulse of many a nineteenth-century critic was to stand that strategy on its head, and methodically to view

[14] Macaulay's essay is in fact a reservation-entering mill: he seems to be incapable of saying anything positive about Johnson which is not at once counterbalanced by something negative.

Johnson's strengths under the aspect of his (alleged) weaknesses.

In seeking to ascertain why reservation and demur increasingly enter into the judgments nineteenth-century critics offer on Johnson's mind and personality, one would want to take due account of the fact that hardly any of them (in marked contrast to their eighteenth-century predecessors) were personally exposed to his 'spell' or personally witnessed the force of his intellect in action. Not that this was necessarily a bad thing: not to have been overwhelmed by Johnson, to have escaped his spell, could in principle conduce to greater objectivity, leading in theory to more reliable, if less flattering, judgments. Then, too, the potential for arriving at judgments less flattering than those of the eighteenth-century commentators was increased by the coming into play of a further factor of no small importance, the factor of historical distance. Viewing Johnson at some remove in time from his own age, the early nineteenth-century critics were in theory much better placed than their counterparts of the preceding generation to see him more inclusively, more 'in the round' - and seeing him thus, to spot failings and limitations that had escaped their predecessors' notice

(or had been consciously or unconsciously shut out by them). These are arguments whose cogency I do not for a moment dispute; nevertheless, my own view is that the increasing frequency of reservation and demur in early nineteenth-century appreciations of Johnson's mind and personality (and other aspects of him as well) is referable less to the critics of this epoch not being subject to his 'spell', less to their possessing the advantage of (comparative) historical distance, than it is to a determination (of which perhaps they were barely conscious) not to be impressed by him and, wherever possible, to discover shortcomings and limitations in him. This determination I situate within the context of the mental structures fostered by the Romantic movement's altogether understandable need, in its early years especially, to strike at the foundations of Johnson's prestige and authority, as a prelude to removing this formidable obstacle from the path to its own success.

Even so, the increased frequency of reservation and demur in nineteenth-century comment on Johnson represented the Romantic offensive against him expressing itself in only a mild form. Once the offensive grew more intense there was no longer room for the nicety of actually

specifying a Johnsonian strength prior to counterbalancing it with a reservation; and what one was then left with was fault-finding, detraction and reprehension pure and simple. The most single-minded of Johnson's Romantic detractors (chief among whom was William Hazlitt) were not interested in paying deference to his strengths, even as a tactical gambit; what interested them was bringing to light and laying bare his deficiencies, as they saw them, in preparation for the work of toppling him from his pedestal. It is to a consideration of the Romantic offensive against Johnson in its more intense, more accusatory form that I now turn[15]; and with this analysis I shall bring the present section to a close.

The point which needs to be made at the outset is that the substantial offensive against Johnson mounted, in the main, during the first two decades of the nineteenth century was foreshadowed by sporadic sniper-fire in the last two of the eighteenth. The occasion of the sniping was his mostly unsympathetic treatment, in the Lives of the Poets (1779-1781), of, in particular, the productions of

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[15] This offensive is usefully surveyed by the historian JCD Clark in chapter 9 of his recent (1994) book on Johnson and "cultural politics". (Chapter 9 is piquantly titled "'Sophistry', 'Indiscretion', 'Falsehood': the Denigration of Samuel Johnson, 1775-1832")

Collins and Gray, 'poets of sensibility' whose rhapsodical inclinations, often laboured straining after sublimity, pursuit of remote and bizarre settings, sentiments and sensations, affectation, on occasion, of a quivering hypersensitivity (S H Clark 10), and tendency to "linguistic exhibitionism" (ibid. 126) all ran counter to Johnson's neo-classical prepossessions which set the highest value on poetic writing characterized by perspicuity of statement, clarity of purpose and structure, dignity, propriety and ease, decent restraint and control, "order and consonance" ("Prior", Lives II 210), a degree at least of rationality and regularity, attention to craftsmanship and finish and, above all, truth to 'Nature', meaning, truth to general human nature and to the common run of human experience.

The strictures against Gray, in particular, were uncommonly severe and thorough-going (and, it has to be admitted, not exempt from nit-picking). But then Gray was so provoking to Johnson; his poetic bent was, after all strongly 'Romantic' (as a later age would have styled it - and with justice, as there are good grounds for regarding the 'poets of sensibility' as proto-Romantics), and Johnson, appraising it from the standpoint of his neo-

classical premises, clearly found a great deal to be irritated by[16]; at any rate, there seems to be at work in the Life of Gray an impulse to 'let rip' that was too strong to resist; an impulse that comes to expression in a vocabulary of denigration as extensive as it is forceful. Thus we meet with epithets such as 'useless', 'puerile', 'obsolete', 'false', 'outrageous'; with references to 'cant', 'puerilities', 'cumbrous splendour'; lines "unworthy of further notice" and "thoughts that [have] nothing new" - not to speak of the caustic dismissiveness of "suicide [as an expedient for ending a poem] is always to be had, without expence of thought", and of "he that forsakes the probable may always find the marvellous" (III 434-40). And then, finally, there is the paragraph containing Johnson's summarizing verdict on "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard", a paragraph that rises to enviable heights of depreciative eloquence:

> These odes are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments: they strike, rather than please; the images are

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[16] Cf. the following entry in Mrs Thrale's Anecdotes:

> He had however no Taste for Modern Poetry - Gray Mason &c. - Modern Poetry says he one day at our house, is like Modern Gardening, every thing now is raised by a hot bed; every thing therefore is forced, & everything tasteless. (in Ingrams 46)

> magnified by affectation; the language is laboured into harshness. The mind of the writer seems to work with unnatural violence. "Double, double, toil and trouble". He has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe. His art and his struggle are too visible, and there is too little appearance of ease and nature. (III 440)

If ever there was a critique tailor-made for raising the hackles of late eighteenth-century readers who were (pardoning the anachronism) 'Romantics at heart', Johnson's allergically hostile appraisal of Gray was it. For that reason it functioned as a well-nigh infallible litmus-test of where readers' sympathies truly lay: if a reader found nothing in it to take exception to, that was a sure sign that his sensibility was 'tuned' to the same neo-classical 'wavelength' as Johnson's; if, on the other hand, a reader found much in it to take exception to, that was a sure sign as well - of his 'Romantic' propensities. Anyway, as I indicated above, it was the offence given to these propensities by what was felt to be "our modern Aristarchus's" (Fitzthomas in Boulton 286) unjust scourging of the poets of sensibility in the Lives that triggered

almost all of the adverse criticism, some of which stopped not far short of invective, levelled at Johnson's mind and judgment in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

As the hostility to Johnson stemmed from the offence given to Romantically-complexioned feelings, it is hardly surprising that these, aroused, imparted to that hostility a Romantic colouring when finally it came to expression in the form of the various protests, rejoinders and critiques mounted by persons anxious to vindicate this or that victim of his calumnies (as they saw it). What bears noticing, however, so far as these late eighteenth-century vindications (or stabs at them) are concerned, is that their Romantic colouring tends to be rather muted; tends to be a subsidiary rather than a dominant feature. So (to change the metaphor), while the Romantic strain is certainly heard in the orchestration of the whole, it is heard only subsidiarily, in the second violins; the main themes, which much overshadow it, are the vindication of a given poet (in most cases Gray, but Cowper too, and even Prior), and the reprobation of the calumniator (the latter of which is, evidently, just the flip side of the former). The exemplary passages given below will, I think, bear out this appraisal. It makes for an interesting comparison to

set those passages alongside a later assessment of the Lives, written by Sir James Mackintosh in 1811, when the tide of Romanticism in Britain was already flowing strongly, if not yet at the full. Like his predecessors, Sir James adopts a generally disapproving attitude to the work and, like them, he takes it upon himself to vindicate Gray and Prior (among others) against Johnson's strictures. But the significant, and revealing, difference between his piece and its late eighteenth-century counterparts lies in the very much altered importance of the Romantic 'strain'. In Mackintosh's 'scoring' it is no longer subsidiary but dominant. Indeed, he can be said to have written a kind of hymn of praise to the Romantic conception of poetic excellence. Correlative with the increased importance of the Romantic strain in Mackintosh's text is the decreased importance of the themes that in the late eighteenth-century productions enjoyed pride of place; namely, the vindication of a given poet and the reprehension of his accuser; these themes are relegated in Mackintosh's reading to a subsidiary, almost incidental status. How is one to account for this all but total reversal of proportions? In my view, there can be little doubt that the dramatically enhanced importance of the Romantic component in

Mackintosh's piece reflects not only the strength of the Romantic currents flowing through Britain in 1811, when he wrote it, but also the enormous success achieved by the Romantic movement in transforming the climate of sensibility within the space of less than a generation after Johnson's late eighteenth-century detractors had their say[17]. The passages which now follow are all, save for the last, the productions of these detractors; the excerpt at the end, Mackintosh's performance, is added for purposes of comparison:

> Instances too frequently occur, in which the Critic's judgment seems altogether under the dominion of predilection or prejudice. ...Of this there need no farther proofs than his almost uniform attempt to depreciate the writers

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[17] Apropos of the strength of Romanticism in 1811, consider this item of information contained in JCD Clark's recent book on Johnson (to which I adverted in an earlier footnote):

> J.G. Lockhart, writing in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in March 1818, claimed that the decisive shift in cultural politics had come in about 1810 when the Edinburgh Review decided to become "a despiser of the poetry of Pope", to talk up the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, and so implicitly...to open the door to the Romantics. (250)

Turning now to a quite different matter: Mackintosh characterizes his evaluation of the Lives as an "impartial estimate" (in Boulton 353). Nothing could be further from the truth. It is an estimate wholly conditioned by the Romantic optic. But is it not an old truth that once our prepossessions are so completely naturalized that the conscious eye loses sight of them, it becomes only too easy to forget that all views are ideologically conditioned, and hence to fancy that one's own are 'impartial'.

of blank verse, and his rough treatment of Gray. He observes of Shenstone, that he set little value upon those parts of knowledge which he had not cultivated himself; his own taste of poetry seems in some degree regulated by a similar standard: method, ratiocination, and argument, especially if the vehicle be rhyme, oftentimes obtaining his regard and commendation, while the bold and enthusiastic, though perhaps irregular, flights of imagination, are past by with perverse and obstinate indifference. (1782) (Edmund Cartwright in Boulton 269)

But what shall we say of his old fusty-rusty remarks upon [Prior's] Henry and Emma? ...[W]hen the critic calls it a dull dialogue, who but a critic will believe him? There are few readers of poetry of either sex, in this country, who cannot remember how that enchanting piece has bewitched them, who do not know, that instead of finding it tedious, they have been so delighted with the romantic turn of it, as to have overlooked all its defects... I wonder almost, that, as the Bacchanals served Orpheus, the boys

and girls do not tear this husky, dry commentator limb from limb, in resentment of such an injury done to their darling poet. I admire Johnson as a man of great erudition and sense; but when he sets himself up for a judge of writers upon the subject of love, a passion which I suppose he never felt in his life, he might as well think himself qualified to pronounce upon a treatise on horsemanship, or the art of fortification. (1782) (William Cowper in Boulton 274)

I cannot quit this subject without taking a review of the Ode [Gray's "The Bard"]... The wild and romantic scenery, the strength of conception, the boldness of the figures, the terrible sublimity, the solemn spirit of prophecy, and the animated glow of visions of glory render this "the finest Ode in the world". ...it rises with an elevated dignity along with the boldest flights of his sublime imagination... Gray inherited the ample pinion of the Theban Eagle, and sails with supreme dominion through the azure deep of air...he

therefore has a claim to the highest rank in the realms of Lyric Poetry.

What could induce Dr. Johnson...to attack this excellent person and poet with such outrage and indecency, we can only conjecture from this observation, "there must be a certain sympathy between the book and the reader to create a good liking". Now it is certain that the Critic has nothing of this sympathy, no portion nor sense of that...etherial flame which animates the poet; he is therefore as little qualified to judge of these works of imagination, as the shivering inhabitant of the caverns of the North to form an idea of the glowing sun that flames over the plains of Chili. (1783) (Robert Potter in Boulton 301-02)

Johnson's Lives of the Poets, and all the records of his own life and conversation, prove that envy did deeply stain his spirit...which [is] incompatible with a...noble mind.

To your question, Whom could Johnson envy? I answer, all his superiors in genius, all his equals...

Gray was indolent and wrote but little; - yet that little proves him the first Genius of the period in which he lived. I have been assured that he had more learning than Johnson, and he certainly was a very superior poet. Johnson felt the superiority, and for that he hated him. It was that consciousness, I verily believe, which impelled him to speak with such audacious contempt of the first lyric compositions the world has seen... Grander in point of imagery and language no odes can be than the odes of Gray. (1796) (Anna Seward in Boulton 413-14)

The time may perhaps now be arrived for an impartial estimate of its [the Lives'] merits. Whenever understanding alone is sufficient for poetical criticism, the decisions of Johnson are generally right. But the beauties of poetry must be felt before their causes are investigated. There is a poetical sensibility which in the progress of the mind becomes as distinct a power as a musical ear or a picturesque eye. Without a considerable degree

of this sensibility it is as vain for a man of the greatest understanding to speak of the higher beauties of poetry, as it is for a blind man to speak of colours. To adopt the warmest sentiments of poetry, to realise its boldest imagery, to yield to every impulse of enthusiasm, to submit to the illusions of fancy, to retire with the poet into his ideal worlds, were dispositions wholly foreign from the worldly sagacity and stern shrewdness of Johnson. As in his judgment of life and character, so in his criticism on poetry, he was a sort of Freethinker. He suspected the refined of affectation, he rejected the enthusiastic as absurd, and he took it for granted that the mysterious was unintelligible... As he had no feeling of the lively and graceful, we must not wonder at his injustice to Prior... His insensibility to the higher poetry, his dislike of a Whig University, and his scorn of a fantastic character, combined to produce that monstrous example of critical injustice which he entitles the Life of Gray. (1811) (Sir James

Mackintosh in Boulton 353-54)

Mackintosh's animadversions upon Johnson begin to sound almost like praise compared to the lengthy, slashing 'bill of indictment' drawn up by William Hazlitt. The Romantic offensive against Johnson reaches its climax in Hazlitt's onslaught which is however no mere exercise in vituperation since he actually is at some pains to construct a case (of sorts) against him, in contrast to, say, De Quincey who is content simply to be defamatory[18].

Hazlitt's attack consists of two separate broadsides loosed within a couple of years of each other; one makes up the bulk of his Preface to Characters of Shakespear's Plays (1817), the other a substantial section of his essay "On the Periodical Essayists" in Lectures on the English Comic Writers (1819). The ostensible aim of the essay on the periodical writers was to bring about a revision of the then dominant view that Johnson's Ramblers were much

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[18] For example:

> Into this great chef-d'oeuvre of Milton [De Quincey is referring to Johnson's estimate of Paradise Lost in the Lives] it was no doubt Johnson's secret determination to send a telling shot at parting. He would lodge a little gage d'amitié, a farewell pledge of hatred, a trifling token...of his eternal malice. Milton's admirers might divide it among themselves; and, if it should happen to fester and rankle in their hearts, so much the better; they were heartily welcome to the poison: not a jot would he deduct for himself if a thousand times greater. O Sam! kill us not with munificence. (in Boulton 313)

superior to the Tatlers and Spectators of Addison and Steele. The ostensible aim of the Preface to Characters of Shakespear's Plays was to vindicate Shakespeare against Johnson's estimate of him as expounded in the Preface and Notes which accompanied his edition, in 1765, of the Plays. But Hazlitt's real aim, for which the ostensible ones served as a stalking-horse, was finally to put paid to Johnson by launching a broad-based attack on his sensibility, judgment and taste, under cover of rallying to the defence of particular works. The larger point that Hazlitt's attack brings into focus is this: that while Johnson could never have been viewed sympathetically by the Romantic critics, his being so formidable an adversary, and one therefore whom it was imperatively necessary to get rid of, had the effect of transforming want of sympathy into positive hostility.

To set Hazlitt's two broadsides alongside each other is to observe that they are not equally antagonistic to Johnson. The anti-Johnson passages in the piece on the periodical essayists are more indulgent in their tone, more elaborate in their syntax and exhibit a prose style more metaphorically-laden and embellished than is the case in the Preface where the mood is aggressive, the dominant

impulse strongly depreciatory, the syntactic formations relatively uncomplicated and the prose style uncommonly forceful and vigorous - thanks not only to its syntactic directness but also, and even more, to its being energized by a bounding forward propulsion deriving mainly from the large number of short, punchy sentences, often following one upon the tail of the other, the accumulation of which imparts notable impetus to the movement of the prose. The exceptional forcefulness (ferocity would not be too strong a word) of the attack on Johnson in the Preface cannot be properly understood without an understanding of the impulse that lay behind its composition. This was the 'gloves off' impulse of a 'fight to the finish'. That such was the character of the motivating impulse was due in its turn to Hazlitt's perceiving his confrontation with Johnson as an exceptionally high-stakes encounter, one involving nothing less than the issue of whose view of Shakespeare, his or Johnson's, would prevail in the estimation of posterity. That Hazlitt viewed the clash with Johnson in this light is implicitly avowed by the remark he lets slip at the end of the Preface where he owns that "If Dr. Johnson's opinion was right, the following observations on Shakespear's Plays must be greatly exaggerated, if not ridiculous. If he was

wrong, what has been said may perhaps account for his being so..." (xxiii).

Given the 'gloves off' impulse informing Hazlitt's attack on Johnson in the Preface, such that he is far more interested in winning the argument than in being fair to his adversary, it is hardly to be wondered at that the view of Johnson which he presents there should turn out to be so gross a caricature. The picture he sketches of a critic of shrivelled sensibility, literalistic turn of mind, and stagnant intelligence permanently imprisoned within the well-worn groove of its narrow orbit, has nothing in common with the kind of person (or critic) Johnson really was or with the kind of intelligence and sensibility he actually possessed. Furthermore, again in keeping with his aim (unavowed, to be sure) of dethroning Johnson rather than being fair to him (and in my view he is less fair to Johnson than Johnson was to Gray), Hazlitt pronounces him a stranger to the cardinal positives of the Romantic creed: imagination, genius and passion. While, therefore, these watchwords come into play in the passages below always and only in order to enforce the point that Johnson was inaccessible to everything they stand for, the simple fact of their coming into play as they do, and as frequently as

they do, constitutes a principal means whereby the Romantic 'strain' contained in these texts is enabled to make itself heard. The passage cited first is taken from the essay on the periodical writers; then follow substantial sections from the Preface to Characters of Shakespear's Plays:

> The Rambler is a splendid and imposing common-place book of general topics, and rhetorical declamation on the conduct and business of human life. In this sense, there is hardly a reflection that had been suggested on such subjects which is not to be found in this celebrated work, and there is, perhaps, hardly a reflection to be found in it which had not been already suggested and developed by some other author, or in the common course of conversation. ...I am not here saying that Dr. Johnson was a man without originality, compared with the ordinary run of men's minds, but he was not a man of original thought or genius in the sense in which Montaigne or Lord Bacon was. He opened no new vein of precious ore, nor did he light upon any single pebbles of uncommon size and unrivalled lustre. We seldom meet with

anything to 'give us pause'; he does not set us thinking for the first time. His reflections...do not disturb the ordinary march of our thoughts...but pass on and mingle with the throng of our impressions. After closing the volumes of the Rambler, there is nothing that we remember as a new truth gained to the mind, nothing indelibly stamped upon the memory; nor is there any passage that we wish to turn to as embodying any known principle or observation, with such force and beauty that justice can only be done to the idea in the author's own words. Such, for instance, are many of the passages to be found in Burke...[where]...the spark of genius seems to have met with its congenial matter: the shaft is sped; the forked lightning dresses up the face of nature in ghastly smiles, and the loud thunder rolls far away from the ruin that is made. Dr. Johnson's style, on the contrary, resembles rather the rumbling of mimic thunder at one of our theatres. ...What most distinguishes Dr. Johnson from other writers is the pomp and uniformity of his style. All his

periods are cast in the same mould, are of the same size and shape, and consequently have little fitness to the variety of things he professes to treat of. His subjects are familiar, but the author is always upon stilts. ...The monotony of style produces an apparent monotony of ideas. What is really striking and valuable, is lost in the vain ostentation and circumlocution of the expression; for when we find the same pains and pomp of diction bestowed upon the most trifling as upon the most important parts of a sentence or discourse, we grow tired of distinguishing between pretension and reality, and are disposed to confound the tinsel and bombast of the phraseology with want of weight in the thoughts. (1819:100-101)

We have a high respect for Dr. Johnson's character and understanding...but he was neither a poet nor a judge of poetry. He might in one sense be a judge of poetry as it falls within the limits and rules of prose, but not as it is poetry. Least of all was he qualified to be a

judge of Shakespear, who 'alone is high fantastical'. ...Nor could it well be otherwise; Dr. Johnson's general powers of reasoning overlaid his critical susceptibility. All his ideas were cast in a given mould, in a set form: they were made out by rule and system, by climax, inference, and antithesis:- Shakespear's were the reverse. Johnson's understanding dealt only in round numbers: the fractions were lost upon him. He reduced everything to the common standard of conventional propriety; and the most exquisite refinement or sublimity produced an effect on his mind, only as they could be translated into the language of measured prose. To him an excess of beauty was a fault; for it appeared to him like an excrescence; and his imagination was dazzled by the blaze of light. His writings neither shone with the beams of native genius, nor reflected them. The shifting shapes of fancy, the rainbow hues of things, made no impression on him: he seized only on the permanent and tangible. He had no idea of natural objects but "such as he could measure

with a two-foot rule, or tell upon ten fingers": he judged of human nature in the same way, by mood and figure: he saw only the definite, the positive, and the practical, the average forms of things, not their striking differences - their classes, not their degrees. He was a man of strong common-sense and practical wisdom, rather than of genius or feeling. He retained the regular, habitual impressions of actual objects, but he could not follow the rapid flights of fancy, or the strong movements of passion. That is, he was to the poet what the painter of still life is to the painter of history. Common sense sympathises with the impressions of things on ordinary minds in ordinary circumstances: genius catches the glancing combinations presented to the eye of fancy, under the influence of passion. It is the province of the didactic reasoner to take cognizance of those results of human nature which are constantly repeated and always the same, which follow one onother in regular succession, which are acted upon by large

classes of men, and embodied in received customs, laws, language, and institutions; and it was in arranging, comparing, and arguing on these kind of general results, that Johnson's excellence lay. But he could not quit his hold of the common-place and mechanical, and apply the general rule to the particular exception, or shew how the nature of man was modified by the workings of passion, or the infinite fluctuations of thought and accident. Hence he could judge neither of the heights nor depths of poetry. Nor is this all; for being conscious of great powers in himself, and those powers of an adverse tendency to those of his author, he would be for setting up a foreign jurisdiction over poetry, and making criticism a kind of Procrustes' bed of genius, where he might cut down imagination to matter-of-fact, regulate the passions according to reason, and translate the whole into logical diagrams and rhetorical declamation. ...Shakespear's bold and happy flights of imagination were equally thrown away upon our author. He was not only without any

> particular fineness of organic sensibility, alive to all the "mighty world of ear and eye", which is necessary to the painter or musician, but without that intenseness of passion, which, seeking to exaggerate whatever excites the feelings of pleasure or power in the mind, and moulding the impressions of natural objects according to the impulses of imagination, produces a genius and a taste for poetry. (1817:xviii-xx)

* * *

If the eighteenth century for the most part admiringly exhibits the principal characteristics of Johnson's mind, if the nineteenth, anxious to clear a major obstacle from its path, strives to depreciate them, the twentieth endeavours to interpret, explain and contextualize them - presidingly within a psychological frame of reference.

So in our century Johnson's mind has mostly become an object of impersonal psychological investigation, grist for the mill of psychologizing interpretations, in the most egregious of which his psyche quite disappears behind the

psychological paradigm foisted upon it by an interpreter intent only on finding something to attach a pet theory to. The flip side of the coin is of course the substantial number of psychological interpretations in which a given theory is applied responsibly to the data and is guided by them. These interpretations are, as one would expect, of varying quality, but the best of them stand out for their explanatory and elucidatory power.

There is both a negative reason and a positive one for Johnson's psychologizing commentators (the responsible and the irresponsible ones alike) finding it not only possible but natural to pursue their inquiries into his psyche in a spirit of intellectual detachment. The negative reason is that the Republic of Letters in the twentieth century feels 'safe' from Johnson, as the partisans of the new Romantic ideas in the first two decades of the nineteenth did not. In our day, and indeed for the past 170 years or so, Johnson and the neo-classical positions he represents have posed no threat, have constituted no obstacle to any new literary, philosophical or cultural theories of whatever complexion. To find a later twentieth-century parallel with the kind of obstacle presented to the early Romantics by Johnson and the doctrine he upheld, one would

need to think in terms of the obstacle post-structuralism would represent for the partisans of some brave new literary creed trying to win a place for itself in the sun. But Johnson! Can anybody today feel threatened by him or, more precisely, by the neo-classical positions he championed? Neo-classicism, as a literary-critical doctrine capable of exerting real influence, has been dead these 170 years, at least. It is therefore easy for us at this remove in time to be detached and dispassionate when appraising its leading exponent.

The stance of intellectual detachment, in no small measure a product of historical distance, is at the same time a means of maximizing its benefits. Herein, it seems to me, lies its positive appeal to Johnson's twentieth-century commentators: to be diligent in the cultivation and care of that intellectual detachment which historical distance has helped to make possible, is to make possible the best use of the advantages it confers.

These, deriving mainly from a dramatic elevation of the coign of vantage, involve the simultaneous deepening and widening of perspective, so that one sees more, sees it in a more 'all-around' fashion, and sees it more complexly. Johnson's psychologizing commentators,

supplementing the benefits of historical distance with the insights yielded by sophisticated psychological theories not known to their predecessors, and bringing to bear in addition a degree of professional expertise that very few, if any, of them could possibly have possessed, venture forth in the conviction (perhaps not avowed but assuredly operative) that they are particularly well-placed to see more of the Johnsonian psyche than ever before, to see it more 'in the round' than ever before, to see it with a fuller and more complex understanding, and to see it from an angle capable of producing insights and suggesting connections that their eighteenth and nineteenth-century counterparts would not have had access to. The remainder of this chapter is the record of the psychologizing and psychoanalysing critics' endeavours to view Johnson's mind and temperament in a new light, from a new angle, in terms of a new ordering of possibilities.

But before embarking on an analysis of these new perspectives, I have to make the point that the cluster of 'high-visibility' mental attributes which made so powerful, immediate - and enduring - an impression on Johnson's eighteenth-century commentators (most of whom, of course, spoke from personal observation), and which most of the

nineteenth-century critics remark as well, if only as a prelude to juxtaposing them with his perceived limitations, are given their full due by the twentieth-century critics as well (despite their generally finding the 'high-visibility' traits much less interesting, from the standpoint of their potential for further investigation, than others, less conspicuous, less commented on, whose symptomatology appears, however, to hold out the promise of voyages of exploration and discovery in psychological waters. But of this, more later). Thus we find the twentieth-century commentators, no less than their counterparts of the two preceding centuries, paying tribute to Johnson's "uncanny memory" (Bate (1975) 531), "prodigious memory" (Krutch 400), "intellectual dexterity" (Clifford (1955) 99), "ready and fertile wit" (Bate (1975) 482), "sweep and readiness of intellect" (ibid. 340), "powerful inquisitiveness" (Krutch 182), "vigorous mind" (idem), "powerful critical intelligence" (Clifford (1955) 270), "powerful ratiocinative intellect" (Wain 156), "intellectual acuteness" (Hovey 325), "penetration" (Bate (1975) 207), and "formidable intellectual powers" (ibid. 531). Just as there is nothing new about the traits noted, so there is nothing new about the language they are are

noted in; phrased as they are, these characterizations could as readily have dropped from the pen of any of the eighteenth or nineteenth-century commentators. On occasion, however, a twentieth-century critic will characterize one or other of the standard 'high-visibility' attributes in such a way as to impart to it an unmistakably twentieth-century 'personality'. Take, for example, Wain's description of Johnson's memory as "a matchless retrieval system" (336), or Clifford's reference to it as "photographic" (1955:47). The unmistakable twentieth-century 'timbre' of these characterizations is achieved by the simple but highly effective device of routing them through metaphors with the right kinds of associations. In the present instances the twentieth-century 'vibrations' arise from the fact that the metaphors appealed to are technologically complexioned, and then from the further fact that the technological advances complexioning them are of comparatively recent date.

Naturally, if the twentieth-century commentators did nothing better with their time than just look for more interesting language in which to livery the same familiar set of mental attributes, they wouldn't be worth our attention. But that, of course, is not their agenda at

all. Rather than seeking to dress the familiar characteristics in unfamiliar language, their endeavour is to bring to light mental traits not previously discerned, to spot connections not previously descried; alternatively, to offer a fresh perspective on the familiar attributes by 'triangulating' them from a new position. Presidingly, the twentieth-century commentators attempt to realize these objectives within the context of the psychologizing or psychoanalysing interpretation. But not exclusively. Consequently, there is a set of insights and 'triangulations', not overtly psychological in their colouring, which requires to be taken account of as well. It is to an analysis of this class of items that I propose to turn first, leaving until last my inquiry into the overtly psychologizing readings of Johnson's mind.

Let me begin by glancing at what looks like an altogether trifling instance of twentieth-century connection-spotting, John Wain's statement that "[t]he cast of Johnson's mind was forensic; he liked to make clear distinctions, and was irritated by confusions" (195). Slight and unremarkable as this judgment seems, it nevertheless shows Wain accomplishing - casually, without fuss or strain - what none of the eighteenth-century

commentators who remarked Johnson's "acute discernment" or "nicety of discernment" (v. supra) managed to accomplish: it shows him spotting, and bringing to notice, the connection between the forensic cast of Johnson's mind and his attraction to distinction-making. Now I want to move on to insights and discoveries that are more substantial. Walter Jackson Bate zeroes in on a mental trait never remarked by his predecessors (nor by his contemporaries, for that matter) when he calls attention to "one of the dominant qualities of [Johnson's] mind", his "strongly anticipative imagination" (1975:107; emphasis in original). As Bate explains it, this kind of imaginative disposition involves "the habit of leaping ahead in imagination into the future and forestalling disappointment and hurt by anticipating...all that could produce them" (ibid. 373). It is the treacherous habit of "overprepar[ing] ourselves for future disasters by refusing to surrender to the present lest we...be taken unawares" (ibid. 374).

Another twentieth-century perception worth calling attention to is the by now widespread recognition of Johnson's "shrewd psychological insights" which, as James Clifford puts it, make "many passages", particularly in Rasselas and in the Rambler essays, read "startlingly like

modern psychiatric analysis" (1979:217)[19]. Going further than Clifford, Bate claims, sweepingly, that Johnson's "sense of the working of the human imagination probably provides us with the closest anticipation of Freud to be found in psychology or moral writing before the twentieth century" (1955:93). Though the eighteenth-century commentators have next to nothing to say about Johnson's psychological penetration (I don't think there is a single reference to it in any of the seven categories presented in the first section of the chapter), they certainly would not have been shut off from the perception of it; nevertheless, could a perception of that kind have been registered as complexly in the days before Freud and 'modern psychiatric analysis' as it can be in our day, now that Freud and psychiatric analysis have become part of the

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[19] Thus Richard B Hovey on the 'mad astronomer' chapters (chs. 40-47) of Rasselas:

> Certain features of these chapters...suggest insights into neurosis which are comparable to those of modern psychiatry: that anxiety is the central symptom of the depressed; that the anguish of guilt, the over-laden conscience, weighs heavily on the melancholiac; that such persons seek ease and expiation by further self-punishment, i.e. self-aggressions; that they are driven to "superstition", i.e. compulsive rituals; that sexual disturbances are a contributing factor in melancholia; that the symptoms of such illnesses are but exaggerations or intensifications of tendencies in the non-neurotic personality... (324)

Hovey not only makes his point, he overmakes it. Isn't he reading too much 'psychology' into the 'mad astronomer' chapters?

'mindset' of our culture? This is something that needs to be borne in mind by twentieth-century readers of, in particular, Rasselas and the Rambler essays who repeatedly come upon passages which pinpoint exquisitely the cunning wiles and stratagems by means of which humankind hastens to deceive itself (and this is but one among several psychologically-complexioned themes that come into focus in these works). If it is a puzzle to such readers that the manifest psychological penetration of the man who wrote those passages appears to have escaped the notice of his contemporaries, it is well to be reminded that we invariably discover what we have been primed to look for, and that readers in our century, in which psychological theorizing has already become part of the general intellectual climate, are more or less conditioned to look for psychological cues and clues in the texts they encounter. So is it any surprise that they find them (even when there are none to find). Eighteenth-century readers and observers of mankind were, by contrast, not thus conditioned; so it is hardly to be wondered at that they failed to spot things that to us seem to 'stand out a mile'. The notion that people who have grown up in this century are in some sort 'primed' to discover psychological

connections and to make psychological inferences also accounts, to a degree, anyway, in my opinion, for Clifford's and Wain's and Bate's alert sensitivity to Johnson's psychological perceptiveness.

In his biography Bate brings under inspection the "dialectic and bisociative character of Johnson's mind" (1975:534). This attribute, "intimately related with the secret of his genius generally" (ibid.481), involves "a creative, 'bisociative'[20] leap between two or more frames of reference, or matrices of experience, previously unconnected and even regarded as incompatible" (idem). I'm not sure whether Bate is here expressing an insight that simply could not have occurred to his predecessors, or whether it is not rather a question of raising to the level of self-conscious statement, and applying an explanatory formula to, what they could only have intuited; however the case may be, certain it is that he makes his point in a way that simply would not have been possible for a pre-twentieth-century critic: not only his terminology but the entire conceptual matrix that stands behind it are the product of twentieth-century psychological theorizing.

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[20] **Bisociation**: "the simultaneous mental association of an idea or object with two fields ordinarily not regarded as related" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary).

While, therefore, it is not impossible that the eighteenth-century commentators who remark Johnson's "amplitude of wit" or "fertility of fancy" or "promptitude of invention" might dimly have sensed that what they were gesturing to was a 'bisociative leap', it is certain that they could never have used that kind of language to describe it. What Bate achieves by bringing to bear on his inquiry into Johnson's psyche the suggestive, and sophisticated, notion of the 'bisociative leap' is an enlargement of understanding, and perhaps an illumination. Here is an instance, it seems to me, where the application of a distinctively twentieth-century frame of reference to a distinctively eighteenth-century mind bears good fruit.

While the eighteenth and nineteenth-century commentators could not be expected to know anything about 'bisociative leaps', they certainly were fully aware of Johnson's immense store of information and learning, and to this awareness they give admiring expression (as instanced in the earlier pages of the chapter). But they do so, without exception (Boswell is only a partial one), in the form of isolated observations which make no attempt to bring his erudition into relation with anything else. It awaits the arrival of twentieth-century criticism for

this to happen: John Wain, surveying the 'scene' from an elevated coign of vantage that would not have been available to his eighteenth-century counterparts, a coign of vantage that enables him to take in a good deal more of the 'whole picture', perceives Johnson's immense knowledge not as a discrete attribute, something standing on its own, but as part of a dyad whose second term is no less important than the knowledge itself is. Writes Wain: "Johnson's great gift was not merely that he knew a great deal but that he had such superb control over what he knew" (242).

As there is nothing arcane about this insight and as, having once been stated, it is indeed seen to correspond to the actuality of the situation in the Johnsonian record, both spoken and written, one may be tempted to ask why the eighteenth and nineteenth-century commentators couldn't perceive for themselves what Wain perceives - namely, the relationship subsisting between Johnson's knowledge and his control of it. After all, they were fully aware of the former, so why couldn't they see it in relation to the concept of control? Things aren't that simple, however: Wain spots the connection because he sees more of the 'larger picture', but seeing the larger picture depends

upon having possession of a sufficiently elevated viewing-platform, and in the absence of historical distance no viewing-platform will ever be elevated enough. The eighteenth-century commentators, lacking the former, correspondingly lacked the latter. It is a mistake to assume that if only they had 'set their minds to it', they somehow, by dint of effort, could have raised up for themselves a vantage point as elevated as that which the historical distance of two hundred years has vouchsafed the twentieth century. To an extent, certainly, it is possible to compensate for the lack of historical distance: where an individual subject is concerned, the perceiver's ability to unite with the advantages of intimacy a capacity for detachment, his possession of strong powers of observation combined with a readiness to reflect upon the observations gathered and try to discover in them some kind of pattern, would amount, to be sure, to quite a considerable compensation. In my opinion, only Boswell, Mrs Thrale and, to judge from a rather sparse harvest of comments, Sir Joshua Reynolds, manage to satisfy those criteria; that is why theirs prove to be the most 'all-around' of the eighteenth-century views of Johnson's mental character.

In much the same way that, seeing the 'larger

picture', Wain links his estimate of Johnson's erudition to the notion of control, so he links his estimate of Johnson's memory to the notion of intelligence. More likely than not this connection would have occurred to Johnson's contemporaries (though I find no mention of it in the evidential record), but it certainly could not have occurred to them in the form it does to Wain, for it occurs to him in a form that plainly reflects the impress of twentieth-century psychological theorizing:

> Sam's mind was the great instrument by which he conquered the disadvantages of his physical and emotional constitution. It was, people already saw, an extraordinary mind, as colossal and in some ways as odd as its owner. To begin with, there was that prodigious memory. This, by itself, is not necessarily a proof of intelligence. Clinical psychiatry can show us examples of certain kinds of imbecile who can memorize a telephone directory. On the other hand, the hypothetical 'brilliant man with a bad memory'...clearly belongs to folklore. One never, in actual life, meets such a man. Every intelligent person has a more or less powerful

memory, for the simple reason that the mind retains what it enjoys and is fed by. (24)

The examples given here of the connections posited by Wain lead to a more general point - that among the twentieth-century commentators there is observable a tendency, little detectable in the two preceding centuries, to link things up. One outcome of this tendency is a disposition, manifested on a number of occasions, to view Johnson's mental traits as joined together (ordinarily in paired combinations), rather than as standing alone. It is thus that Boswell views them when he declares that "in him were united a most logical head with a most fertile imagination" (Life 1402). But Boswell (strange as it may seem) stands virtually alone among the eighteenth-century commentators in being vouchsafed a composite perception. In the twentieth century, by contrast, it becomes something of a tendency, referable surely, but not solely, to the commentators of our day being so much better placed than were their predecessors (thanks to the advantage of historical distance) to see things 'in the round'. Here are some examples of mental attributes perceived in 'hand-holding mode'; that is, in combinatory formations:

[Johnson's 1745 editorial commentary on Macbeth

exhibited] a combination of shrewd common sense and scepticism, overlaid with a passionate aesthetic appreciation. (Clifford (1955) 270)

So powerful an intelligence, associated with so intense an interest both in letters and in human nature, could no more be narrow than shallow. (F R Leavis (1944) 203)

[T]he principal value of this long gymnastic feat [Johnson's Parliamentary Debates] was more general. This came from what it did to develop that astonishing union of ready fertility with judicious balance...which...is one of the most distinctive qualities of Johnson's mind... (Bate (1975) 207)

But getting at the "quintessence" of things...was already proving to be attainable...and was in time to become a distinguishing feature of his thought and expression. In fact, in the combination of exactly this ability with readiness of mind, he was ultimately to prove unequaled, or at least unexcelled, not only in his own century but also in the entire history of verbal intelligence as

far as we know it. (ibid. 78)

The larger Johnsonian picture, which the twentieth-century critics have been so much better placed to bring within their field of vision than their eighteenth or early nineteenth-century counterparts, has not only played a role in generating insights and suggesting connections not previously registered, but has also served another function - that of the contextualizing backdrop against which to project Johnson's mind and sensibility, thereby setting them off in a new light, and in consequence enlarging our understanding. Let me turn without further ado to exemplification. The example I want to bring forward of the 'larger picture' functioning as a contextualizing frame is, in my opinion, a particularly revealing one because of the comparison it invites with Hazlitt's hostile treatment of Johnson in his Preface to Characters of Shakespear's Plays. Well, by contrast with Hazlitt, whose method is that of the bill of indictment in which Johnson's alleged limitations and faults are set forth one after the other with hardly any attempt to account for them, F R Leavis takes it upon himself to contextualize, and thereby to explain, Johnson's limitations as a critic of Shakespeare. These limitations he makes no attempt to conceal, but

instead of just listing them and reprobating Johnson for them, as Hazlitt does, he makes it his business to situate them within the context of his training and of the literary-cultural milieu of which he was the product and was, in time, to become the defender. Leavis's first step is to specify the limitations; and these, as spelled out by him, are, in essence, the same as the ones Hazlitt bears down on: namely, that Johnson's ear is deaf to Shakespeare's poetic genius owing to his "inability to appreciate the more profoundly creative uses of language" (1965:110); moreover, the "exploratory-creative use of words upon experience, involving the creation of concepts in a free play for which the lines and configurations of the conventionally charted have no finality, is something [Johnson] has no use for" (ibid. 109)[21]. The shortcomings once stated, however, Leavis hastens to contextualize them, with reference, firstly, to Johnson's training:

> When we come to his treatment of Shakespeare, Johnson's...training gets more radically in the way of appreciation than where Milton is concerned. The critic for whom the Augustan use

[21] For the purposes of the present argument I shall be conflating two essays by Leavis, on the grounds that the later one is a palpable echo of the earlier. The essays are "Johnson as Critic" (in Scrutiny 1944), and "Johnson and Augustanism" (The Common Pursuit 1965)

> of language is the undisputed norm cannot come to terms with the Shakespearian use. He understands and he doesn't understand - because his training opposes. (1944:192; 1965:108)

Next (and finally), Leavis brings to bear upon Johnson's failure to respond to Shakespeare's 'creative use of language' the explanatory frame of the literary-cultural milieu that shaped him:

> Nothing could be more unlike the Shakesperian use of language than that in which Johnson's mind and sensibility have been formed. For him, in this the type Augustan, expression in poetry as in prose is a matter of stating - of stating with point, elegance and propriety. ...Shakespeare's 'thoughts' [however]...are apt to be...highly complex - which is to say, compressed and licentious in expression... The Augustan cannot conceive the need for such a use of language. The ideas he wants to express are adequately provided for - and this is true of poetry as of prose - in the common currency of terms, put together according to the conventions of grammar and logic. He doesn't feel that the

current concepts of ordinary discourse muffle or misrepresent anything he has to convey. His business is, while observing the ordinary rules in arranging them, to achieve further a formal pattern of meaning-structure and versification. He can express himself congenially in modes that are in such a sense and at such a level social that this pattern (like Augustan idiom itself) suggests formal conventions of social manners and public deportment. It is an age in which everyone of any cultivation knows so well what Reason, Truth and Nature, the presiding trinity, are that no one feels any pressing need of definitions... It is not an age in which the poet feels called on to explore further below the public surface than conventional expression takes cognizance of, or to push in any way beyond the frontiers of the charted. He has no impulse to indulge in licentious linguistic creation, nor does it occur to him that such indulgence may ever with any propriety be countenanced. (1944: 193-94)

In situating Johnson's limitations within an

explanatory contextualizing frame, Leavis's aim is to get the reader to understand them before making a judgment. By presenting essentially the same limitations as part of a 'bill of indictment' (or something not much different from one), Hazlitt's aim, by contrast, is to get the reader to make a judgment - an adverse one, of course - before, or in the absence of, understanding - and in consequence to accept as valid his caricature of Johnson as a critic of crude, literalistic intelligence, narrow sensibility and niggardly sympathies. The figure who emerges from Leavis's explanatory frame is very different: a critic with limitations, certainly, but ones which were scarcely to be avoided given his training and his literary-cultural milieu; in short, a critic with an unavoidable blind spot among his manifold strengths.

Before embarking on my analysis of the overtly psychologizing readings of Johnson's mental character, I want to try to account for the twentieth-century commentators' fertility in finding new things to say about it - their bringing to light mental traits not previously remarked, positing connections not previously descried, discovering 'angles' not previously detected.

I should want to say, to begin with, that, thanks to

the advantage of historical distance and to the availability of the 'larger picture', assembled piece by piece in two centuries of comment and opinion, interpretation and reinterpretation, the twentieth-century commentators enjoy possibilities of detecting 'angles' and gaining insights that would not have been accessible to their predecessors - and these possibilities manifestly have been taken up. A second point is that they have been often taken up in a particularly profitable way since those taking them up have been in a position to bring to bear upon them a professional expertise: most of the twentieth-century commentators have been (or are) academics (almost all eminent), the very character of whose training and occupation is such as to spur them to link things up, look for connections, discover pattern and coherence in an amorphous mass of data. Hardly any of the eighteenth and but few of the nineteenth-century commentators were 'baked' in this kind of mould: though well-educated and sufficiently discerning, the eighteenth-century critics were yet deficient in the trained rigour and professionalism of most of their twentieth-century counterparts. They were, after all, men of the world, not of the Academy; with the exception of Boswell (and, to an

extent, Mrs Thrale) they lacked the leisure and/or the incentive to make Johnson a focus of absorbing interest, still less a focus of intensive study. Nor did they feel impelled to view him 'in the round', or to frame totalizing hypotheses about the quality and workings of his psyche. The testimonies they have left us (which provision the seven categories presented above) make it clear that what impressed them about his mind were precisely those 'high-visibility', 'high-impact' attributes that impress easily and immediately. These were the attributes they placed on record, usually impressionistically and almost always discretely. The surface was glittering enough for them; they were not tempted to dig beneath it for buried treasure. A further point to bear in mind is that a writer-researcher in the professional, meaning, often, the academic line has ready access in our day to immense resources of information, easily tracked down in efficiently-run libraries; this is an advantage which can make all the difference when it comes to the essential task of fleshing out the 'larger picture' (in whatever field of study), a task whose successful outcome may crucially depend upon having access to posssibly rare materials which are only to be found in the major libraries. And in this

context one needs to call attention to the enormous difference that has been made to the fleshing-out of the larger Johnsonian picture by the serendipitous discovery of the Boswell Papers (now in the library of Yale University) at Malahide Castle and Fettercairn House in the earlier decades of the century. This stroke of good fortune has been productive of a host of new insights into Johnson, Boswell and the milieu as a whole. Some of the most interesting of these arise from the discrepancies that come into view when those of the Papers which stand behind the Life are placed alongside the published work. The last point I want to make is this: the leading twentieth-century contributors to the analysis of Johnson's psychical constitution - here I have in mind his four major twentieth-century biographers: Joseph Wood Krutch (1948), James L Clifford (vol. 1 1955; vol. 2 1979), John Wain (1974), and Walter Jackson Bate (1975) - have all written their studies in the shadow of the greatest of all biographies in English, Boswell's Life. This has placed them under exceptional pressure, to which they would not have been have been exposed had their productions been in competition with a performance less overwhelming than Boswell's. After the Life, can there be anything

worthwhile left to say about Johnson? This is a dilemma to which Bate, in particular, could not but have been especially sensitive as five years before publishing his biography of Johnson he wrote an entire book about it, The Burden of the Past and the English Poet, whose burden is, precisely, "the intimidating pressures, on the practising writer, of great models of the past" (56), leading to a "loss of self-confidence" (ibid. 7)[22]. Now, when "in the past so much [has] already been done so well that it seem[s] impossible to compete in the same way" (ibid. 80), there obviously exists a strong motive to compete in a somewhat different way. In the case of the four biographers referred to above, there is room for the conjecture that this motive would have been registered pragmatically as a push to look for, and thereafter to

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[22] Two hundred years before Bate, in Rambler 86, Johnson comments on the same dilemma:

> One of the ancients has observed that the burthen of government is encreased upon princes by the virtues of their immediate predecessors. It is, indeed, always dangerous to be placed in a state of unavoidable comparison with excellence... He that succeeds a celebrated writer, has the same difficulties to encounter; he stands under the shade of exalted merit, and is hindered from rising to his natural height, by the interception of those beams which should invigorate and quicken him. (IV 87)

Consider also this statement by Krutch in the Foreword to his biography: "But the...tremendous reputation of Boswell's Life has tended to discourage any attempt in recent times to produce a large inclusive book which would serve to give the general reader a running account of Johnson's life, character, and work as they appear in the light of contemporary knowledge and contemporary judgment" (vii).

underscore, aspects of the Johnsonian story and psyche disregarded, or pehaps shunned, or else only glanced at by Boswell (Johnson's fear of insanity would be an obvious example). I am far from wishing to argue that this felt pressure can account on its own for the new insights, 'angles' and connections which come to the fore with particular frequency in the works of this quartet of authors. After all, thanks to the 'larger picture' vouchsafed the twentieth century, new ideas about Johnson were already in circulation - there for the taking if anybody wanted to make use of them; and the four biographers in question would certainly have been aware that to do so could only enrich their analyses of Johnson's psyche. So here was incentive enough already for making sure that they gained entry into their books. What I am suggesting, however, is that the four biographers' consciousness of being in competition with Boswell, and hence of being under the necessity of giving their performances a distinct identity that would sharply differentiate them from his (otherwise what reason would anybody have for reading their books in preference, or in addition, to Boswell's?) functioned supplementarily to strengthen the already existing incentive to find new

things to say about Johnson. This point, and the three which precede it, together provide an explanation, it seems to me, for the rich harvest, in twentieth-century analyses of Johnson's mind, of new insights, angles and connections of the kind documented above.

But the kind documented above tell only half the story, if that. Why so? Because the main impetus, by a long way, for new insights into, and angles on, Johnson's mind and temperament has been the immense body of psychological and psychoanalytical theorizing whose unintermitted augmentation since the eighteen-eighties or thereabouts has been one of the truly striking features of twentieth-century culture. I wonder whether, in the absence of this phenomenon, very much would have been written in our century about Johnson's mental character. And getting back to the four biographers mentioned above, in whose books the psychological 'angle' is prominent (in Bate's very prominent), I wonder whether, if they had not had this 'angle' at their disposal, they would have thought it worth their while to write a major work on Johnson at all, given the intimidating presence of Boswell's Life. Would there have been enough new and different things to say about him to justify so laborious an enterprise? In

that sense, didn't the twentieth-century explosion in psychological theorizing come providentially to their rescue[23]? These are questions that bear asking, though it is of course impossible for me to know the answers to them. Anyway, to return to the thread of the argument: the point I want to enforce is that the really substantial and interesting (if also, on occasion, far-fetched) interpretations of Johnson's mind and temperament that have been ventured in our century, have been ventured within the

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[23] In my survey of views of Johnson's mind over a period of 250 years, I have come across only three statements of an unmistakably psychologizing cast that belong to the pre-twentieth-century segment of the continuum (that is, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries taken together). These are they:

> No one had however higher notions of the hard task of true Christianity than Johnson, whose daily terror lest he had not done enough, originated in piety, but ended in little less than disease. Reasonable with regard to others, he had formed vain hopes of performing impossibilities himself; and finding his good works ever below his desires and intent, filled his imagination with fears that he should never obtain forgiveness for omissions of duty and criminal waste of time. (1786: Mrs Thrale in Sherbo 97)

> His mind, at this time strained and overlaboured by constant exertion, called for an interval of repose and indolence. But indolence was the time of danger: it was then that his spirits, not employed abroad, turned with inward hostility against himself. His reflections on his own life and conduct were always severe; and, wishing to be immaculate, he destroyed his own peace by unnecessary scruples. (1792: Arthur Murphy in Hill I 408-09)

> From the refinements of abstruse speculation he was withheld...by a secret dread that they might disturb those prejudices in which his mind had found repose from the agitations of doubt. (1811: James Mackintosh in Boulton 349)

The perceptions contained in these statements are all, in one way or another, taken up, and refined upon, by Johnson's psychologizing commentators.

context of psychological and psychoanalytical researches, theories and findings. It is to a consideration of those interpretations as developed within that context that I now turn; and with this analysis I shall bring the chapter to a close.

The first point to be made is that for critics of a psychologizing or psychoanalysing disposition Johnson's mental and emotional character beckons irresistibly as a kind of Treasure Island or, if one prefers superterranean riches, as "the fair Hesperian Tree/ Laden with blooming gold" (Milton, Comus). His "vile melancholy" (Life 27), two prolonged episodes of psychological breakdown (or near breakdown), compulsive tics and gestures, hypertrophied sense of guilt, fear of insanity, dread of death and solitariness, alternation between spells of indolence and bursts of feverish activity; his mixture of tenderness and asperity, his mental rigidities in some areas contrasted with extraordinary elasticity and openness of mind in others, come together to produce a psychological profile whose pathological and aberrant features hold out great promise, for critics of a psychologizing tendency, of much happy digging and much diagnostic fun. And dig and diagnose they certainly do, with notable energy and

confidence. Their attitude has little in common with the kind of reticence, stemming perhaps from a finely tuned feel for eighteenth-century proprieties, which Sir Joshua Reynolds exhibits in his reply to a correspondent who had sought information about the 'set' of Johnson's mind: "An attempt to go deeper [than the surface], and investigate the peculiar colouring of his mind as distinguished from all other minds, nothing but your earnest desire can excuse" (in Hill II 220). Well, there is very little of Sir Joshua's reticence to be found in the writings of the psychologizing critics of the twentieth century. Confident that the psychological theories and discoveries of the last hundred years or so have placed in their possession the key that will unlock the mysteries of Johnson's psyche, they stride boldly and energetically forward. Scruple or doubt are seldom allowed to impede their onward progress[24].

A survey of the psychologizing interpretations of Johnson's mind shows that while a variety of theoretical

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[24] In a display of diffidence not at all characteristic of the general attitude adopted by Johnson's psychologizing critics, Margaret Lane declares: "As to Johnson's...psychological peculiarities, it must be said at once that it is fairly useless to speculate about them, since we have to admit in the end that we cannot know" (22). [emphasis in original]

My purpose, though, in citing Lane's statement is to make the point that her diffidence is but short-lived, despite her insistence that 'we cannot know'; before long there she is with the best of them, putting in her pennyworths of psychological speculation (v. pp. 48, 49, 56, 143, 200, 201).

models have been appealed to, none has been appealed to more often to serve as an interpretative frame than the Freudian - sometimes with happy results, sometimes with less than happy ones. With regard to the variety of theories available to Johnson's psychologizing commentators to choose from, James L Clifford writes as follows:

> Freudians, when they sift the evidence, find an Oedipus complex, with an unhealthy attachment for his mother and an unconscious hatred of his father. One recent writer has hazarded the guess that because of his mother's early treatment of him, Sam consciously or unconsciously "rejected her whom he most wished to love" and as a result developed a "torturing sense of guilt and sin". Identifying himself with his father, he fell heir to his father's own fear of madness. Others have suggested an inferiority complex which had its origin in his physical and social handicaps. Still others find in him an unresolved conflict between an uncompromising rationalism and his strong emotional drives. Each describes the disorder according to the terminology of his own school

of thought. (1955:24)

Whatever the theoretical model they choose, when it comes to their handling of it Johnson's psychologizing commentators fall into two camps: the 'imposers' and the 'adaptors', if I may so designate them. The 'imposers' are those who do to Johnson what Hazlitt alleged he did to Shakespeare: they make a Procrustean bed of their favoured theoretical paradigm, forcing the data to fit its dimensions rather than the other way around. The reason they do this would seem to be that, having spotted a promising Johnsonian tidbit to which to attach (meaning, upon which to foist) a pet theory, they go charging ahead and do just that, regardless of the injury offered to good sense or to the facts themselves. The upshot is, of course, a procession of forced and distorted interpretations. What undoubtedly increases the momentum of the imposers' descent into interpretative disarray is the fact, first, that the vehicle (in the shape of the pet theory) which they think they're driving is in reality driving them and, second, that it has no brakes - 'brakes' meaning an acquaintance with more (a good deal more) of the Johnsonian oeuvre than just that small patch in which the 'juicy morsel' was lighted on; and an acquaintance also

with some basic biographical information about Johnson. Still, for all their misdoings, the imposers appear to stand accused rather of error, resulting from theory-fixation married to ignorance, than of wilful misrepresentation; as against that, however, it needs to be remembered that they could have avoided error had they wanted to, but seem to have had no great desire to do so. Consequently, have we to do here with willed error? If so, the imposers are a deal worse off as the dividing line between willed error and wilful misrepresentation is not that broad.

The 'adaptors', in contrast to the 'imposers', invariably set off from a position of knowledge - often very extensive - of the oeuvre, the milieu and the Johnsonian psyche. They know enough to know whether or not a given psychological model is compatible with 'the facts of the case'; and if it is they adapt it to those 'facts' (rather than foisting it upon them). So in this case the favoured theory functions not as a rigid tyrant condemning the data to a Procrustean fate, but rather as an aid to interpretation receiving guidance from what the 'facts of the case' already suggest. It is the readings of Johnson's psyche which have come about in this way that so impress -

for their ability to shed light on what previously was obscure, to spot the importance of what previously seemed insignificant, and to find pattern and meaning in what previously looked amorphous. In making this judgment I have in mind chiefly Bate's illuminating Freudian reading of Johnson's psychology, but I think Wain's and Clifford's studies possess comparable virtues, if on a smaller scale.

I don't want to devote much space to the productions of the imposers; however, for reasons of completeness some kind of report on their interpretative capers is called for. Of these Bate offers an amusing digest:

> Among recent psychiatric interpretations [Bate is writing in the early fifties], the most convincing is a fragmentary discussion, based on Carl Jung, which suggests that Johnson's personal distress can be construed as an unresolved conflict between an exacting rationalism and strong emotional drives of a general sort. Less satisfying is an interpretation - based largely on the facts that Johnson drank a lot of tea and sometimes bit his nails - that deciphers his whole character in terms of oral eroticism, but without much hint

> how we then distinguish Johnson from innumerable other mammals. Nor need we take seriously the belief that Johnson's chronic melancholy was a result of being sexually impotent because so much of his libido had been directed toward intellectual achievement. The principal evidence used here is Johnson's casual, pessimistic remark, "I never wished to have a child". It is construed as an unconscious rationalization of "I never could have a child". ...Too often, by invoking the quick answer of sex, we show ourselves children of the later nineteenth or early twentieth century. (1955:148)

Hinted at in this statment is the point that some of the most egregious of the imposers' excesses date from the twenties, thirties and forties, those decades of particular ferment and stir in psychological and psychiatric circles following the irruption into the English-speaking world of Freud's theories, either through translation of his works or in more popularized form. The interpretation, summarized above, which 'deciphers [Johnson's] whole character in terms of oral eroticism' is a good example of

how Freudian (or Freud-inspired) theories developed in the twenties can all too easily become a high road to absurdity when adopted overhastily and in the absence of a sufficient (or any) acquaintance with the 'larger Johnsonian picture'. However, the triumph of psychologizing enthusiasm over good sense is by no means confined to the first half of the century. Take, for example, this reading, dating from 1971, which postulates that "Johnson's fears were the most puissant of the offspring of his repressed mother-hate, and he needed them to assuage the guilt he felt for hating his mother" (in Lane 22). The verdict Lane renders on this interpretation is forthright enough: "great nonsense" she calls it (idem), and in my opinion she's quite right. I shall conclude this review of the imposers' trespasses by bringing forward a more extended example. Richard B Hovey sets the alarm-bells ringing in the very first paragraph of his article "Dr. Samuel Johnson, Psychiatrist" when, in discussing Rasselas, he proposes these arbitrary identifications: "For just as Rasselas represents the seeking Johnson, and as Imlac, the guide and philosopher, represents him in an ethical sense, so the [mad] astronomer represents Johnson as a suffering neurotic" (321). But things start going really wrong when Hovey shifts the focus

of attention from the tale to the state of its author's mind at the time he wrote it. For what he does at this point is to foist upon the facts a despotic theoretical model which forces them into its mould and into compliance with its bearings. In this way he manages to produce an interpretation wrenched enough to serve as a kind of paradigm-case of the vice:

> The circumstances of the composition of Rasselas are much to the point here. Writing the book immediately after the death of his mother (whom he had not visited for twenty years), Johnson must have been nearly shattered by grief and a sense of guilt. The loss of a loved one means, of course, the breaking of a bond of love. Such a bond, according to Menninger, has hidden within it a core of hostility. So, when the love object was suddenly removed, the bond, instead of being gradually absorbed and redirected as in the normal person, snapped back upon the melancholy Johnson's self and in so doing broke into its two component parts of love and hate. In the self-directed hatred which Johnson probably felt after his mother's death,

> his own conscience doubtless troubled him like that of his astronomer. And the astronomer's delusions became, as it were, a transcript of the dread fantasies poor Johnson was himself wrestling with at this critical time. Clearly, both Johnson and his astronomer were troubled in their erotic lives. Although Johnson does not explicitly point a connection between the astronomer's celibacy and his delusion, he has this character complain, "I have missed the endearing elegance of female friendship, and the happy commerce of domestic tenderness". (324)

When we come to consider the performances of the 'adaptors', we find a quite different picture. For a start, the psychological model appealed to is an aid, not a Procrustean tyrant. Consequently, in the adaptors' productions it does not bulk as large in its own right as it does in, say, Hovey's. It is there, to be sure, but operating in the background, guiding the interpretation, not tyrannizing over it. I suspect, however, that the main reason why the adaptors' performances strike one (me, anyway) as persuasive and illuminating is that the psychologizing strand is throughout interwoven with real

knowledge and understanding of the larger Johnsonian picture, a picture it both enriches and is held in check by. But these claims are better served by the force of examples which bear them out than by the weight of further exposition. So to those I now turn. The source of the first is John Wain's fine biography of Johnson:

> In Johnson's case, once he had made up his mind, at nineteen or twenty, that Christianity was true, the warring elements in his own mind proceeded at once to their action stations. Christianity provided fuel both for the constructive and the destructive forces in him. On the constructive side, it directed and energized his innate benevolence and generosity. The sheer number of people whom Johnson helped is astonishing, only less so than the unbelievable amount of trouble he would take on their behalf. His capacity for sympathy, provided the sufferer was really distressed and not acting a pantomime, was endless. Destructively, his Christianity helped to bring out, and to make more vehement, his tendency to irrational guilt and self-accusation. [Here Wain

is echoing Mrs Thrale's perception, cited above in a footnote] The child of ageing parents, constantly brought out to show his paces, he had lived out his infancy with a never-ending sense of being on trial. He had a deep need to give and receive love, but neither of his parents had any means of expressing affection; his mother's way of showing her love for him was to nag him as she nagged his father, and this had bred in him a sense of inadequacy, of a continual failure to come up to the required standard, so that with one deeply embedded part of his mind he felt that his existence was one long betrayal.

Given this pattern, it is understandable that the features of Christianity on which Johnson's mind laid its strongest hold were minatory. He saw God not as a loving father but as a judge, who had the absolute right to consign him to an eternity of torment. Furthermore, being a Protestant, he had no prescribed set of rules for getting past this judge. Roman Catholicism provides the believer

> with a guaranteed rule of thumb for getting to Heaven. The Protestant has to plot his individual course. It was here that Johnson's sense of his own intellectual and spiritual power was a torture to him. For, if much had been given to him, correspondingly much would be asked. The parable of the steward who let his talent lie unused in a napkin was terrible to him. A standard of behaviour, of piety, of devotion, that would get most people clear of the gates of Hell might not be enough for Samuel Johnson. In childhood, he went to his mother for love and acceptance, and was met, all too often, with anxious reproaches; and by the time he came to accept God as his super-parent the pattern was fixed. (54-55)

Wain refers in the cited passage to Johnson's 'tendency to irrational guilt'; this is a tendency remarked by just about all of his psychologizing commentators, imposers and adaptors alike. But the adaptors, because of their greater 'all-around' understanding of his mind and temperament, invariably perceive his feelings of guilt as operating in inter-relationship with other destructive

psychical forces; of particular interest in this regard are the interpretations which portray his guilt-feelings as both nourishing and feeding off other failings and failures (which Johnson, on account of the over-exacting standards he set for himself, was ever prompt to view rather as derelictions and self-betrayals). These are interpretations, in other words, which situate his guilt-feelings within the context of the 'vicious-circle' paradigm - a context the imposers have little or no access to: not surprisingly, considering how tenuous is their grasp of the larger Johnsonian picture. In the two items which follow, Johnson's guilt-feelings are interpreted within the framework of 'vicious-circle' theory:

> [Johnson's] pervasive sense of guilt grew still more as a side-result of his own conviction that the responsibility of an aware and moral being is to 'put to use' his awareness and moral sense. It was therefore strongest after the comparative failure, in his own eyes, of the most strenuous period of his life, when he had tried to clarify motives and ideals as fully as possible and seemed unable to abide by them.
>
> Worst of all, there is now the dread that

to lose the sense of guilt...might remove an incentive necessary to spur one into activity or 'reform'. [Having once got started, a] vicious circle creates its own by-products. These, in turn, simply provide further hurdles, which, if not overcome, harass and complicate the feeling of inadequacy even more. (Bate (1955) 153-54)

Everywhere through the records of Johnson's early years runs the theme of procrastination. The hardest thing he ever had to do was to force himself to get down to work. ...One way his sluggishness showed itself, he thought, was in his inability to get up at a reasonable hour in the morning. His later prayers are filled with resolutions for early rising and with shamefaced admissions of failure. ...Yet the more he resolved, the more fixed the difficulty became. ...Every time he reproached himself for what he thought was a moral weakness, he nourished a sense of guilt. Yet this same sense of guilt was at least partly responsible for his condition. Thus there was a never-ending circle of tormenting cause and effect. (Clifford

(1955) 58-59)

The next example, while also a 'vicious-circle' reading, bears not upon guilt-feelings but upon Johnson's fear of going mad, one of the most hideous, as well as disabling spectres by which his mind was haunted:

> Because of his initial fear of mental disintegration, he clung fiercely to the two strongest things he knew - reason, and obedience to God. He did not dare let go of either. But the difficulty of reconciling them brought on fresh agonies and tensions; his very fear of madness drove him into a position where madness often seemed inevitable. (Wain 157)

As the Romantic offensive against Johnson reached its climax in the two broadsides unleashed by Hazlitt, so the psychologizing 'strain' in twentieth-century interpretations of his mental character comes to a culminating point in Walter Jackson Bate's avowedly Freudian readings which are comprehensively developed in the admirable biography of 1975, but are already in evidence in his earlier work of 1955, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson.

Bate's Freudian reading of Johnson's psyche takes the

form, basically, of a three-pronged analysis. What I propose to do is first offer a summary of each of these inter-related lines of investigation and then leave it to Bate to speak in his own voice.

The first 'prong' of Bate's analysis develops the hypothesis that Johnson's mental and emotional conflicts were the enactment (as well as the outcome) of a collision between the impossible demands made on him by a hyperactive and hypercritical superego and his inner resistance to them, a resistance manifested symptomatically in his abnormally prolonged spells of lethargy (among other aberrations). It bears mentioning that when Mrs Thrale in her Anecdotes speaks of Johnson's feeling under pressure to "perform impossibilities" (in Sherbo 97), she is offering an insight that anticipates, in rudimentary fashion, Bate's sophisticated account of Johnson's persecution by his superego.

In the second 'prong' of his tripartite probe Bate argues that Johnson's insistence upon taking responsibility for himself and his disdain of 'whining' prevented him from projecting outwards the aggressions and frustrations attendant upon his inner conflicts; finding no outlet, they were accordingly directed inwards, against himself; this

self-aggression served only to intensify his distress of mind and spirit. Already in 1792 Arthur Murphy (as Bate acknowledges) had glimpsed this destructive process of inward-directed aggression: "...But indolence was the time of danger: it was then that his spirits, not employed abroad, turned with inward hostility against himself" (in Hill I 409).

Finally, with respect to Johnson's compulsive tics and gestures, Bate advances the hypothesis that they were the manifestation of a drive to gain relief from psychological distress by "divid[ing] up" his 'sea of troubles' and so reducing them to "manageable units" (1975:382).

Now it's time for Bate to speak in his own voice - though not quite as he does in the biography; for in an endeavour to give a coherent overview of his position, I have, in the citations below, stitched together bits and pieces from different parts of the book. The first of these composite citations spotlights the first 'prong' of his analysis:

> [T]he cruelest of psychological burdens that he was to face throughout his life...was the fierce and exacting sense of self-demand - for which Freud gave the now-common term "superego" - with

> its remorseles capacity, in some natures, to punish the self through a crippling sense of guilt and through the resulting anxieties, paralysis, and psychosomatic illness that guilt, grown habitual and strongly enough felt, begins to sprout. "The great business of his life", Johnson told Reynolds, "was to escape from himself; this disposition he considered as the disease of his mind" [Bate's emphasis]. The part of himself from which he needed to escape was the remorseless pressure of "superego" demand, of constant self-criticism, and all the unconscious ruses of insistent self-punishment. ...[His] extraordinary, almost pathological "indolence"...[m]ore accurately described...was a powerful inner resistance, even protest, against the unceasing pressure of strong self-demand. This at least was its primary element, before it became complicated by the further self-conflicts it engendered. (1975:121;34)

The second 'prong' of Bate's reading is developed in these terms:

> [O]ne of the most striking things about

Johnson's whole psychic nature is the severe rein he kept on any temptation...to project outward and to blame external conditions. Instead his whole procedure...was to meet a thing head on...and then internalize and contain it. ...However strong the suppressed anger against life being what it is - "a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed" - he would not "whine". Nor would he blame or project on others, or on society, or even, beyond a point, on the universe generally lest it become a charge against God Himself. ...With the iron check that he kept on envy - his scorn of either blaming the system of life or of resenting the good fortune of others - and with his tendency to accept self-responsibility, there was nowhere else for his aggressions to turn except against himself. ...With the aggressive hostility turned against himself...[t]he result...was time and again a pattern of self self-conflict [and so]...it was perhaps inevitable that he...developed acute psychosomatic ills to such a degree that he was

never entirely to overcome them. (1975:73;124;376)

Of the third 'prong' Bate gives the following account:

> [The] tics and convulsive movements - often extreme - were certainly of psycho-neurotic origin and not, as has sometimes been assumed, of organic origin. ...[T]he compulsion neurosis behind them showed a powerful unconscious need to release nervous tension through order, pattern, or rhythm and keep it from overwhelming the psyche - a need to "divide up" the welter of subjective feeling and reduce [it] to manageable units, which we also see in his constant resort to arithmetic and counting. Examples would be his touching the posts as he passed, and going back if he missed one; adjusting his steps so that his foot would touch a threshold at a particular moment; blowing out his breath loudly like a whale when he finished a lengthy remark or a dispute, as if to punctuate it and give it finality; treading the floor as if measuring it and also testing its firmness or stability; or making patterns with his heels and toes..."as if

endeavouring to form a triangle or some geometrical figure". (1975:125;382)

In offering this account of Johnson's oddities, Bate is the first critic, so far as I am aware, to actually make sense of them. Almost all of the earlier commentators remarked his compulsive behaviour, but without trying, or being able, to make sense of it. Bate, however, armed with an unrivalled grasp of the larger Johnsonian picture, and bringing to bear upon the data a hypothesis of impressive explanatory power, succeeds not only in making sense of (that is, providing a plausible explanation for) Johnson's compulsive tics and gestures, but also in showing that they are all linked up to one another in a coherent pattern; are all manifestations of a unitary underlying impulse to "order subjective experience, to divide it up, round it off", and so make it "manageable" (1975:383) - and that is to make better sense of them still.

Bringing Johnson's 'oddities' under scrutiny some two hundred years before Bate, Miss Reynolds (Sir Joshua's sister) confesses in her "Recollections of Dr. Johnson" that she is unequal to the task of accounting for them: "What could have induced him to practise such extraordinary gestures who can divine!", she exclaims (in Hill II 274).

Well, the hypothesis Bate advances perhaps returns an answer to that exclamation. He, perhaps, has indeed divined the cause.

* * *

Boswell in the Life records this exchange between Goldsmith and Johnson:

> Dr. Goldsmith said...that he wished for some additional members to THE LITERARY CLUB, to give it an agreeable variety; for (said he) there can now be nothing new among us: we have travelled over one another's minds. Johnson seemed a little angry, and said, "Sir, you have not travelled over my mind, I promise you". (1208) [emphasis in original]

Can the constellation of opinions, judgments, interpretations and hypotheses assembled in the pages of this chapter be said to have 'travelled over' Johnson's mind. I doubt it. A mind like his, so comprehensive, complex and majestic, at once so richly assimilative and so powerfully discriminative, is not to be 'travelled over' - not completely, anyway; for such a mind will always

surpass any attempt to take its measure. While making no claim, therefore, to have 'travelled over' Johnson's mind in the foregoing pages, I would yet hope to have given some kind of shape and structure to two hundred and fifty years of observation and insight bearing on the Johnsonian psyche; and I would hope further that the structure or 'mind map' thus assembled can serve as a backdrop against which to project my own hypothesis regarding the build and workings of Johnson's mind; or, putting it another way, that it can serve as a contextualizing frame into which my hypothesis may be inserted and with reference to which it may be evaluated. What I propose to do in the next chapter is present the evidence which I trust will lend support and credibility to that hypothesis.

CHAPTER THREE

SAMUEL JOHNSON, INVETERATE DISTINCTION-MAKER

"The mixture of those things by speech, which by nature are divided, is the mother of all error: to take away therefore that error, which confusion breedeth, distinction is requisite." Richard Hooker.
(Cited by Johnson in his Dictionary to illustrate sense (7) of "distinction")

The kind of knowledge Dr Johnson valued had its roots in human experience rather than in theory, which he viewed, with mistrust, as "inactive speculation" (in Crane 400). "Human experience, which is constantly contradicting theory, is the great test of truth", he declared (Life 320-21), a declaration which a few days later found concrete expression in his celebrated 'refutation' of Bishop Berkeley's idealistic philosophy:

> After we [Johnson and Boswell] came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to

> prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus'[1]. (Life 333) [emphasis in original]

So when Boswell observes that "Johnson loved...to have his wisdom actually operate on real life" (Life 691), there is no reason to doubt his word.

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[1] Elsewhere Johnson gives verbal expression to the point which here is enforced by way of physical demonstration; Boswell records the following statement: "If a man should give me arguments that I do not see, though I could not answer them, should I believe that I do not see?" (Life 1319)

With regard to the stone-kicking episode itself, H W Liebert has made an insightful comment that (rightly, in my opinion) shifts the argument away from the narrow, and unproductive, issue of the level of Johnson's philosophical sophistication to the broader one of the act's more general import as a swipe at the self-gratifying pointlessness of metaphysical speculation , a perennial Johnsonian bête-noire (Sachs 39). Liebert writes:

> When Johnson kicked the stone he was not refuting Berkeley, in spite of what he said at the moment. He was rather attacking the fact which he always greeted with impatience: that in a world, in his own phrase, "bursting with sin and sorrow", men should wander in the endless labyrinths of metaphysics when they might be improving the lot of others in this world or their own in the next. As a philosophical answer to Berkeley, his gesture is meaningless; as an emphatic assertion of the imperative reality of a world in which men live and suffer, it is the essential statement of Johnson's doctrine. (in Greene (1965) 20)

If Johnson was impatient of theory and theorizing in life, the same held true for literature. Writing of Addison he notes that contemporary opinion viewed him as an 'unscientific' critic prone to "deciding by taste rather than by principles" ("Addison", Lives II 145). These are words that come not amiss when applied to Johnson himself; and not a few twentieth-century commentators tend to view him in much the same light as 'contemporary opinion' viewed Addison. Among them is W R Keast:

> Certainly no other English critic of equal reputation has been known as little by his systematic thought, as contrasted to his particular judgments on books and writers. In his critical writings systematic inquiry is rarely met with and, when present, is introduced sparingly into discussions prevailingly occupied with concrete questions of evaluation. Unlike many of his contemporaries - including several whose theoretical work he admired - Johnson composed no treatises...this reluctance to engage in extended statements of theory reflects Johnson's profound suspicion of abstract speculation, a suspicion to which he gave

repeated expression in his writings...[2] (in Crane 390-91)

Given this backdrop it should come as no surprise that nowhere in his oeuvre (to my knowledge) does Johnson formulate a systematic, self-conscious, comprehensive statement on the subject of distinction-making. Consequently, trying to arrive at some idea of his thinking on the question becomes an exercise in piecemeal reconstruction involving the bringing together of discrete remarks drawn from a number of scattered sources. Stitched together they may be able to offer something approaching a coherent view of his outlook on distinction-making.

Reconstructing a perspective - Johnson's outlook on distinction-making: contexts and connections

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[2] Keast is quick (and right) to point out that Johnson's not being a systematic literary theorist in no way implies that his engagement with literature was a casual, adventitious, catch-as-catch-can affair. On the contrary, says Keast, if Johnson "was not a systematic writer, [he] had at any rate a systematic mind: the kinds of critical problems with which he deals, the particular doctrines and judgments he puts forward, the stands he takes on the leading critical issues of his day, and the methods of argument he habitually employs can all be traced in his criticism, early and late, to a coherent view of literature and a coherent body of assumptions concerning both its practice and its evaluation. That Johnson distrusted theory there can be no question, but such distrust can become...in itself a theoretical commitment" (in Crane 391). The greater part of Keast's informative essay consists in an exposition of the 'coherent body of assumptions' underpinning Johnson's praxis as a literary critic.

Sharing Keast's general outlook is Robert Voitle, who comments: "Though Johnson is not at all systematic, his...thought is impressively consistent when seen wholly, and in the context of his times" (ix).

At the heart of the distinction-making enterprise is the act of discrimination, a word whose etymon is the Latin noun discrimen meaning, literally, "that which separates or divides". Hence "discrimination" is defined as "A judgment of difference [my emphasis] between two or more objects, each of which is discerned from the total context of experience at the time" (in Baldwin I 284).

The phrase 'a judgment of difference' invites special notice because it spotlights the role long assigned to Judgment of descrying differences between things. The office of discerning similitudes, by contrast, has usually been assigned to Wit or to Fancy (interchangeable, in the pre-Coleridgean era, with Imagination). To this paradigmatic apportionment of functions Hobbes, for one, subscribes:

> ...in this succession of mens thoughts, there is nothing to observe in the things they think on, but either in what they be like one another, or in what they be unlike...Those that observe their similitudes...are sayd to have a Good Wit; by which, in this occasion, is meant a Good Fancy. But they that observe their differences, and dissimilitudes; which is called

> Distinguishing, and Discerning, and Judging between thing and thing...are said to have a good Judgement. (Leviathan 33) [emphasis in original]

Locke regards the operational spheres of Judgment and Wit in much the way Hobbes does:

> Wit l[ies] most in the assemblage of Ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable Visions in the Fancy: Judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, Ideas, wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another. (An Essay concerning Human Understanding 156) [emphasis in original]

In assigning the office of distinction-making to the faculty of Judgment both Hobbes and Locke do no more really than restate the received view, so when Johnson makes the same linkage he too may be following the received view rather than the lead of Hobbes and/or Locke. Whatever the

case, it is evident from a number of his critical observations that he views Judgment as the 'active ingredient' of the separating process that lies at the heart of distinction-making, while assigning, again in keeping with the received view, a combinative value to Fancy. Consider the following examples:

> When a number of distinct images are collected by these erratick and hasty surveys [of the mind], the fancy...combines them into pleasing pictures... [However, under] the reign of judgment...we begin to find little pleasure, but in comparing arguments, stating propositions, disentangling perplexities, clearing ambiguities, and deducing consequences. (Rambler 151, V 39-40)

> He [Pope] had Judgement, which selects from life or nature what the present purpose requires, and, by separating the essence of things from its concomitants, often makes the representation more powerful than the reality. ("Pope", Lives III 247)

> Here [in Paradise Lost] is a full display of the united force of study and genius; of a great

> accumulation of materials, with judgement to digest and fancy to combine them. ("Milton", Lives I 183)

Johnson appears to view increasing proficiency in the making of distinctions (which necessarily implies increased finesse in the operations of Judgment) as an index not only of a growth in intellectual sophistication at the individual level but of civilizational progress as well. As far as the individual is concerned, he notes in Idler 70 that "he that thinks with more subtilty will seek for terms of more nice discrimination"[3] (II 218) - a remark that explains his enrolment of "accuracy of distinction" among the "superiour faculties" (Rambler 77, IV 44). On the civilizational level the noting of "the differences of things" constitutes one of the marks of a society's passage from the stage of mere "convenience" to that of "elegance" (Idler 63, II 196, 197). So here we see Johnson contextualizing distinction-making both culturally and historically within a broad, though impersonal, frame.

The next step, accordingly, is to turn the spotlight on to his own distinction-making drive and ask whether

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[3] Cf. Life of Cowley: "It is with great propriety that subtlety, which in its original import means exility of particles, is taken in its metaphorical meaning for nicety of distinction" (Lives I 21).

there are connections to be made that could enlarge our understanding of it - as well as of what is linked up with it. Well, I believe there are: Johnson's 'drive to distinguish' is profitably viewed, it seems to me, in relation to his permanent aspiration to the greatest possible precision and clarity of expression and thought[4]; the particular relationship in which it stands to this aspiration is that of prerequisite condition for its attainment. For insofar as clarity and precision are contingent upon the separation of things essential from things adventitious, upon the aptness and distinctness of the terms being used[5], upon argumentative rigour and, in a

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[4] Among the manifold excellences of Johnson's discourse, one of the most striking, for his hearers, interlocutors and readers alike, was its extraordinary accuracy and perspicuity. At a number of points in the Life, Boswell variously refers to Johnson's "most perspicuous...language" (181), to the "extraordinary...precision of his conversation" (284), to his "very remarkable...attention to precision and clearness in expression" (1212), and to his "force and perspicuity" unequalled by "any English writer" (156). Of the same mind as Boswell, William Bowles, another of the Sage's friends, places on record the following reminiscence: "He was always most perfectly clear and perspicuous; and his language was so accurate, and his sentences so neatly constructed, that his conversation might have been all printed without any correction. At the same time, it was easy and natural; the accuracy of it had no appearance of labour, constraint, or stiffness" (ibid. 1246). Echoing Bowles's verdict, William Cooke, one of the tribe of Johnsonian biographers destined to be eclipsed by Boswell, writes: "He always expressed himself with clearness and precision, and seldom made use of an unnecessary word - each had its due weight, and stood in its proper place" (in Page 27). Against this backdrop the following judgment by W K Wimsatt strikes me as well-aimed: "In Johnson's prose the lexicographer joins the stylist in an accuracy both of understanding and of imagination" (1948:106-107).

[5] An accusation often levelled at Johnson, in his own day and since, is that he had a discreditable weakness for 'big words'; that is, learned, long, latinizing, out of the way words. The weakness was

more general way, upon the dispersal of muddle and confusion, they are plainly contingent upon acts of

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discreditable, so the allegation went (and sometimes goes), because it was motivated by a wish to show off, by a proneness to pomposity and bombast, and by an urge to be overbearingly intimidating in his discourse, whether spoken or written. This is an allegation in two parts; the rejoinder likewise is in two parts, each of which challenges the factual basis, in each of its parts, of the allegation. In the first place, if Johnson's recourse to 'big words' is projected against the backdrop of his oeuvre as a whole, it will be seen to be nothing like as general as it is often (with the assistance of selective quotation) alleged to be. Indeed, writes Paul Fussell, "[i]n conversation as well as in writing and reading, one of his delights is the significant avoidance of the sesquipedelian" (1972:79). Second - and this is much more relevant to the point under consideration - while Johnson did perhaps on occasion brandish 'big words' to intimidate the opposition, there was no question of his using them to gratify a proneness to pomposity or bombast since to these failings he was not prone. What really, and over-ridingly, determined his recourse, from time to time, to learned, often philosophically complexioned, language was a sleepless drive (rather than just a desire) to satisfy the most exacting standards of precision, clarity and aptness (and elegance as well, wherever possible) in his use of the English tongue - in other words, to satisfy those desiderata referred to in the discussion above. These were for him desiderata of the highest importance and if, in order to satisfy them, it was necessary, from time to time, to enlist the help of a recondite word or a learned locution, that was a small price to pay when set against the prospective gains. That his recourse to 'big words' was connected with considerations of the kind urged here we have it on Johnson's own authority (which, given his inflexible attachment to the truth, must be regarded as above suspicion of taint by special pleading): in the very last of his Ramblers, where he casts a retrospective and judgmental eye on his labours of the preceding two years, he tells us that "When common words were less pleasing to the ear, or less distinct in their signification, I have familiarized the terms of philosophy by applying them to popular ideas" (Rambler 208, V 319). The reasons Johnson advances here for making use of 'the terms of philosophy' are seconded by the testimony of Mrs Thrale who in corroborating them also takes a swipe at the imputation of 'pomposity' undeservedly though widely levelled against him: he was, she declares, "no pompous Converser, & though he was accused of using big Words, it was only when little ones would not express his meaning as clearly, or when the Elevation of the thought would have been disgraced by a Dress less superb" (in Page 79). It seems to me that Thomas Woodman strikes an appropriate balance in arguing that when Johnson made use of learned words, he did so "not only for the authority that they confer[red] on him but also because they enable[d] precise distinctions to be made" (154) - thereby serving the interests of precision and clarity.

discrimination (even while serving, perhaps, to 'fine-tune' them at the same time). Rogers speaks of Johnson's "forensic zeal for precision" (76), but zeal on its own is not enough to achieve precision, whereas distinction-making, even in the absence of zeal, is very well able to. Accordingly, when we come upon Johnson confiding to Reynolds that he trained himself "by constant practice" never to "suffer any careless expressions to escape him, or...to deliver his thoughts without arranging them in the clearest manner" (Life 145), it seems to me, though he nowhere refers to a distinction-making drive, that it was just this drive, so intuitive as to escape his notice, which made it possible in the first place for his regime of training and practice to bear the fruit it did. Had distinction-making been absent from the picture, would any amount of practice and training have been enough to bring precision and clarity within his reach?

It is worth probing a little deeper and asking why precision and clarity were so important to Johnson. Certainly he valued them as stylistic desiderata in their own right - and also as they contributed to other leading positives in his stylistic scheme of things, positives such

as forcefulness, vividness and elegance[6]. I think he valued them too because they performed an ethical function by contributing towards "uncover[ing] the underlying principles governing moral life, and then...reassert[ing] these in challenging and effective ways" (Rogers 29). For a moralist as committed and exigent as Johnson was, it would have been only natural to set a high value upon a contribution of this sort. But in my opinion the main reason he set so much store by clarity and precision was that he viewed them in some sort as a counter to, more exactly, perhaps, as a bulwark against, the unavoidable, but for all that still unwelcome, instability and ambiguity of language - and, in so far, as a kind of bridge to, as well as an earnest of, determinate verbal meaning[7]. As a

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[6] Cf. Pat Rogers:

> To speak broadly, [Johnson's] critical positives include freshness, truth to nature, vigour, clarity, energy, sharpness of focus, and wit. It is perhaps easier to start with defining by negatives. The attributes Johnson disliked...included triteness, staleness, affectation, over-ingenuity, and perverseness...He opposes hereditary images, inert conventionalities of thought and diction, avoidance of the natural...He also has a particular objection to archaism...And nothing could compensate for a lack of interest; all literary virtues were useless without this. 'Tediousness', he observes in the life of Prior, 'is the most fatal of all faults...' (93-94)

[7] As early as 1786, in his "Essay on the Stile of Doctor Samuel Johnson", the Reverend Robert Burrowes, treating of the merits of Johnson's prose, posits a link between his drive to determinateness in the use of language and his quest for clarity and precision. Johnson's words, writes Burrowes, "are forcible and harmonious; but, above all, they are determinate. Discriminated from each other, and appropriated each to one idea, they convey...the author's...genuine

way of highlighting what was at stake for Johnson, let me turn the preceding statement around and say that for him to have been unmindful of precision and clarity would have amounted, in Martin Maner's words, to "surrender[ing] to unmeaning" (142). A surrender of this kind would be unsettling enough for anybody, but for Johnson, having regard to his preternaturally 'lexicographic' cast of mind[8], it would have been unsettling in the highest degree, a nightmare to be avoided at all costs - or, rather, at the relatively modest cost of making the distinctions requisite to the attainment of precision and clarity.

The mention of Johnson's 'lexicographic' cast of mind calls attention to the fact that the arena in which his pursuit of determinate verbal meaning works itself out most fully in a formal way is the Dictionary. The effort - in

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sense, without superfluity and without mutilation. ...For thoughts the most definite, he has language the most precise; and though his meaning may sometimes be obscure, it can never be misunderstood..." (in Boulton 333).

[8] What I here term the 'lexicographic' cast of Johnson's mind constitutes one indication among several that his pursuit of determinate verbal meaning formed part of a more general temperamental hankering after determinateness, certitude, unambiguity. Lending support to this hypothesis are:

- M H Abrams's reference to Johnson's "preference for poems which are perfectly unambiguous, to all people, at first sight" (in Hilles 178).
- the observation by Walter Jackson Bate, one of Johnson's recent, and best, biographers, that "his nature was such that he could never remain content with 'mystery'" (450).
- J D Fleeman's perception of "Johnson's personal and emotional desire for intellectual and religious certainty and stability" (in Wahba 113).

reality a permanent struggle - to realize that objective manifests itself, to be sure, in the oft-remarked incisiveness and precision of his definitions[9] (Bate (1975) 250), but in my view a yet more noteworthy manifestation of his attempt to palliate an evil - the ambiguity of language - that cannot be cured[10] (DeMaria in

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[9] A term with which Johnson himself might have been less than happy - consider the following caveat entered by J McLaverty: "Johnson consistently avoids the term 'definition' for his dictionary entries, using the word 'explanation' (occasionally 'interpretation') instead". This proceeding, continues McLaverty, "is...deliberate: it signifies the adoption of Locke's theories of knowledge and language in preference to those others which exerted so strong an influence on Johnson's predecessors and contemporaries" (377).

McLaverty then proceeds to argue the case for Locke's influence on Johnson's Dictionary, following which he arrives at this conclusion:

> [Johnson] agreed with Locke that few things or ideas could be adequately defined because human knowledge is too limited: simple ideas are irreducible, mixed modes too complex, substances essentially unknown. To claim, therefore, that real definition in a representative number of cases could be easily accomplished was mistaken...Similarly, to call explanations of names by synonyms, negation of the contrary, or location definitions was to misname them and make false claims to understanding. Hence the preference for the word explanation or interpretation in the Dictionary. (390) [emphasis in original]

While Johnson may in theory have agreed with Locke about the virtual impossibility of adequate definition (an acquiescence signalled by his avoidance of the term 'definition', as noted above by McLaverty), in practice that did not deter him from always striving for the highest degree of perspicuity and accuracy in everything he wrote or said. Consider in this connection the following pronouncement in the Life: "Some people... tell you that they let themselves down to the capacity of their hearers. I never do that. I speak uniformly, in as intelligible a manner as I can" (598).

[10] That language, far from being a transparent medium, was inherently ambiguous and inexact, was an eighteenth-century philosophical theme (and philosophical plaint). Germane in this connection are Carey McIntosh's remarks:

> Some writers questioned whether language was capable of genuine clarity. Three substantial chapters of book 3 of the Essay concerning Human Understanding are devoted to

Korshin 165) is his endeavour, as a matter of lexicographic policy, to discriminate, more systematically and more fastidiously than ever before, the various senses of a single signifier; and, as a parallel undertaking, to tease out the fine differences between separate signifiers commonly thought to be synonymous, or nearly so[11].

To give effect to the objective of discriminating the various senses of a particular word as systematically and as fastidiously as possible, Johnson has recourse to the method of "divided and classified definitions"[12], as Sledd

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> the "Imperfections of Words," which by their "very nature" are often "doubtful and uncertain in their significations" (2:104). Locke's warnings were echoed through the eighteenth century, not only by poets and novelists but also by some of the grammarians and philosophers who were most publicly committed to the value of precise thinking. (40)

[11] In addition to this dual undertaking, he is also at pains to distinguish obsolete from current words, and polite usage from vulgar. So here is yet another distinction-making axis built into the design of the Dictionary - and it is one that particularly caught the eye, and earned the praise, of the noted German lexicographer, Johann Christoph Adelung who, writing in 1798, comments as follows:

> It is well known, that all the words of a language do not possess an equal value or degree of currency: some of them are entirely obsolete...others are peculiar to poetical language; again, others are current only in certain provinces, or in particular situations of life; and still others are vulgar, and exploded from the more dignified written style, as well as from the polite circles of conversation. It is one of Johnson's great merits, that he has carefully attended to this distinction. (in Boulton 121)

[12] While it is true, as Sledd and Kolb point out (43), that this method was not of Johnson's invention, it is as true that the use he makes of it as an instrument for partitioning and delimiting the shades of verbal meaning is sophisticated, sensitive and thorough-going in a way, and to a degree, that none of the English lexicographers who preceded him came near to equalling. So it seems to me that Kathleen

and Kolb term it (44). Under this method, which is built into the design of the Dictionary, is carried out consistently through the full extent of the work, and was refined upon in successive editions (DeMaria 159), a separate semantic domain is staked out for each of a word's different senses. To each several sense is then subjoined a full apparatus of illustrative citations (see the exemplary insert on "Wit"). In effect this comes down to treating each separate sense like a separate word. For DeMaria Johnson's going to such "overexacting" lengths is evidence of a hyper-fastidiousness that requires to be explained, and he explains it by placing it in the context (rightly, I think) of the lexicographer's indefatigable (or is it compulsive?) quest for determinate verbal meaning. Thus, writes DeMaria, Johnson's semantic categorizations are "more orderly, logical and distinct than the language they record", and these "overexacting divisions of words into senses amount to a wish that each word become so many distinct unambiguously referential words" (in Korshin 165, 166). Of this wish, delusive or not, and of the method adopted to give effect to it the outcome is an

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Wales is not overvaluing Johnson's contribution when she claims that his lexicographic "work was the first which provided overall a comprehensive, and sensitive, treatment of semantic distinctions" (27).

WIT, n.s. [*ȝewit*, Saxon, from *Witan*, to know.]

1. The powers of the mind; the mental faculties; the intellects. This is the original signification.

> Who would set his *wit* to so foolish a bird?
> *Shakespeare*

> The king your father was reputed for
> A prince most prudent, of an excellent
> And unmatch'd *wit* and judgment. *Shakespeare*

> Will puts in practice what the wit deviseth:
> Will ever acts, and *wit* contemplates still:
> And as from *wit* the power of wisdom riseth;
> All other virtues daughters are of will.
> Will is the prince, and *wit* the counsellor,
> Which doth for common good in council sit;
> And when *wit* is resolv'd, will lends her power,
> To execute what is advis'd by *wit*. *Davies*

> For *wit* and power, their last endeavours bend
> T'outshine each other. *Dryden*

2. Imagination; quickness of fancy.

They never meet but there's a skirmish of *wit* between them. – Alas, in our last conflict four of his five *wits* went halting off, and now is the whole man govern'd by one. *Shakespeare*

Lewd, shallow, hair-brain'd huffs, make atheism and contempt of religion, the only badge and character of *wit*. *South*

> And though a tun in thy large bulk be writ,
> Yet thou art but a kilderkin of *wit*. *Dryden*

Wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance, or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures in the fancy. Judgement on the contrary, lies in separating carefully one from another, ideas, wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude. *Locke*

> Could any but a knowing prudent cause
> Beget such motions, and assign such laws?
> If the great mind had form'd a different frame,
> Might not your wanton *wit* the system blame?
> *Blackmore*

3. Sentiments produced by quickness of fancy.

All sorts of men take a pleasure to gird at me. The brain of this foolish compounded clay, man, is not able to invent any thing that tends more to laughter, than what I invent, and is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that *wit* is in other men. *Shakespeare*

extraordinary sharpness of differentiation - and therefore distinctness of individual outline - among the various senses of a word. Under the method of 'divided and classified definitions', as used by Johnson, the interests of definiteness of signification, that is, determinateness of verbal meaning, are about as well served as they can be by means simply of the plan on which the linguistic items are arranged, as distinct from the degree of accuracy with which they are defined or (mindful of McLaverty) explained. Given Johnson's tireless push in the Dictionary to distinguish amongst the various senses of a single word and, in parallel with that, his push (discussed immediately below) to lay bare and 'nail down' the subtle shades of difference between separate words mistakenly supposed to be synonymous, it evidently follows that the Dictionary brings into sharper focus than does anything else in his oeuvre the capital role played by distinction-making in his persistent quest for determinateness of signification[13].

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[13] The essence of Johnson's position in this matter is compactly expressed by the novelist Evelyn Waugh in these terms: "Words have basic inalienable meanings, departure from which is either conscious metaphor or inexcusable vulgarity" (in Aitchison 39).

Johnson's quest for determinateness of signification was less an occupational phenomenon, it seems to me, than one rooted in the build and workings of his mind. What I mean to suggest by this statement is the following: that it was not so much a question of his craving determinateness of signification because he found himself a lexicographer as of his finding himself a lexicographer because he had the kind of mind that craved determinateness of signification. As I

As I have just intimated, another 'high-profile' role performed by distinction-making in the Dictionary is that of pointing up the fine differences between signifiers commonly thought to be synonymous and hence taken to be interchangeable in usage. Johnson's opinion was that in principle no language in the putatively 'pure' state of its inchoation had, or needed to have, synonyms[14]. These were aberrations spawned by a 'defilement' of the originary purity; in other words, by sloppiness, confusion, misapplication, poetic licence, and the like. The following exchange in the Life brings Johnson's position

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see it, the hints dropped by the following passage from the "Preface" to the Dictionary (a passage already cited, though less fully, at the end of Chapter 1) lend support to this hypothesis:

> The nice and subtle ramifications of meaning were not easily avoided by a mind intent upon accuracy, and convinced of the necessity of disentangling combinations, and separating similitudes. Many of the distinctions which to common readers appear useless and idle, will be found real and important by men versed in the school philosophy, without which no dictionary shall ever be accurately compiled, or skilfully examined. (in Bronson 253)

I may add, as a pendant to the above observations, that Johnson strikes me as a prime exemplar of logocentric Western Man (as Derrida constructs, and then deconstructs, him) in his pursuit of stable (if not eternally fixed) and determinate verbal meaning. But in this particular Johnson's outlook simply reflects that of his age, the Age of Enlightenment - as it also reflects (and must reflect) that of all dictionary-makers of all ages.

[14] It is worth remarking, in this connection, that the effect of some recent trends in linguistic theory is to give backing to Johnson's contention that, in principle, there is no genuine synonymy in language. The trends referred to advance the hypothesis that while there may be 'equivalence of reference' between allegedly synonymous verbal collocations, there cannot be 'equivalence of meaning' (v. Coseriu in Ringbom 41).

into focus:

> WALKER: Do you think, Sir, that there are any perfect synonimes in any language? JOHNSON: Originally there were not; but by using words negligently, or in poetry, one word comes to be confounded with another. (1225)

Projected against this backdrop the brief Johnson gives himself of teasing out the fine differences between words wrongly taken to be synonymous[15] can be seen for what in fact it is - essentially a labour of recuperation. By stripping away the accretions of misapplication and confusion responsible for occulting original significations, and thus also the differences between them, he hopes to bring once-existing distinctions back into view[16], and in so doing both serve the interests of

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[15] The whole of Idler 100 is really an ironically melancholy gloss on the mischief which ensues from a failure to distinguish as one should between terms supposedly equivalent. The rueful last paragraph reads:

> This, Mr Idler, I have found by long experience to be the character of a good sort of woman, which I have sent you for the information of those by whom "a good sort of woman" and "a good woman" may happen to be used as equivalent terms, and who may suffer by the mistake (II 308)

[16] This ambition was remarked as long ago as 1786 by the Reverend Robert Burrowes in his "Essay on the Stile of Doctor Samuel Johnson" (already adverted to in a previous footnote) which must still rank as one of the most incisive treatments of the subject. Burrowes writes:

> Possessed of the most penetrating acuteness and resolute precision of thought, he delights to employ himself in discriminating what common inaccuracy had confounded, and of separating what the grossness of vulgar conception had united. (in Boulton 332)

Johnson is however too much the realist to cherish the hope of recovering, or restoring, an uncorrupted, linguistically univocal age innocent of semantic confusion and uncertainty, an age in which "there would scarce be any mistake" because "one single word...express[ed] but one simple idea, and nothing else" (Isaac Watts in Korshin 165; Johnson uses Watts's remark to illustrate sense (2) of "single" in the Dictionary). In the "Preface" to this work he gives expression, in a ruefully undeceived way, to the recognition that the recovery of linguistic purity or the installation of a virtually lexicographic standard of fixity in language is a mere pipedream:

> I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that words are the daughters of earth [and therefore subject to misuse, corruption, change], and that things are the sons of heaven. Language is only the instrument of science [i.e. scientia, knowledge], and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote. (in Bronson 238)

Despite this rational, clear-sighted perception that language, by reason simply of its being 'in the mouths of men', is fated to become irremediably 'contaminated', it appears nonetheless that Johnson's yearning for an originary purity died hard, for he does, in a sense, venture some way towards attempting its recovery; the sense in which he does this, as James Gray points out, is through a "tendency to restore words to their etymological meaning" (213) (v. also Hardy 118-19), a tendency whose ultimate source is doubtless a yearning for the perfectly denotative, flawlessly transparent language of Man's unfallen state in the Garden of Eden where, according to the myth, "one word conveyed the root meaning of one thing without the possibility of confusion", where the language Adam spoke was infallibly semiotic, "penetrat[ing] the surfaces of things...and...mov[ing] directly,...like an arrow, to inner natures, illuminating them instantly and once and for all...[a] plenary instrument of communication...necessarily transparent...[and] not pestered, like our own partial instrument of speaking and writing, with ambiguity or distracting connotations" (Fraser ix).

Johnson's 'tendency to restore words to their etymological meaning', as Gray phrases it, answers, in the Dictionary, to the established lexicographic principle of furnishing etymologies; upholding this principle, he accordingly declares, in the "Preface", that the "original sense of words...must be inserted for the sake of a regular origination." "Thus I know not", he continues, "whether ardour is used for material heat, or whether flagrant, in English, ever signifies the same with burning; yet such are the primitive ideas of these words, which are therefore set first, though without examples..." (in Bronson 247).

More interesting to observe, however, is the way in which Johnson's impulse to cleave to the "original and etymological sense" of words (Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language, in Wilson 132) manifests itself outside the formal lexicographic terrain of the Dictionary, showing through, for example, in the rap over the knuckles he administers to Boswell for his "impropriety" in befriending the phrase 'to **make** money': "Don't you see...the impropriety of it? To

semantic determinateness and, at a more practical level, provide a reliable guide to correct usage. As an example of his practice, consider his handling of the word "adhesion" (sense 1):

> The act or state of sticking to something. Adhesion is generally used in the natural, and adherence in the metaphorical sense: as, the adhesion of iron to the magnet; and adherence of a client to his patron. (in Wimsatt (1948) 45)

As early as 1747, with the Dictionary barely beyond the stage of inception, Johnson had already set himself the objective of disentangling, and thereafter distinguishing between, supposedly equivalent terms[17]. In his Plan for the Dictionary, a prospectus addressed to the Earl of

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make money is to coin it: you should say get money" (Life 872) [emphasis in original].

[17] It is necessary to add, in the interests of presenting a balanced picture, that this objective is referable not just to his distinction-making drive expressing itself as a zest for bringing to light differences between supposedly synonymous words, but also to eighteenth-century lexicographic trends, as compared to those that were normative during the Renaissance, and later. This is a point made by Sledd and Kolb: "...synonymies of the later eighteenth century were concerned to distinguish words which had been linked in dictionary definitions since the Renaissance; but the eighteenth century was a discriminating age, and when the time and the man came together, Johnson did the work which someone was destined to do" (44).

Given the position I am defending in this study, I cannot let Sledd and Kolb's statement pass without the following gloss: that it was not just any adventitious 'someone' but Johnson specifically who was 'destined', because of his distinction-making mindset (and, naturally, other qualifications as well), to do the work of showing up differences between supposedly synonymous terms.

Chesterfield which dates from that year, this objective is clearly spelled out:

> The difference of signification in words generally accounted synonimous, ought to be carefully observed; as in pride, haughtiness, arrogance; and the strict and critical meaning ought to be distinguished from that which is loose and popular; as in the word perfection, which...is...so much degraded from its original signification... (in Wilson 133-34)

What this statement amounts to is a programmatic declaration of intent, and Johnson's self-consciously methodical manner of carrying it into effect in the Dictionary turns his objective of discriminating differences between supposedly equivalent terms into a high-visibility, full-dress project. But in the rest of the oeuvre the same objective is no less present and no less operative, only, since Johnson is under no comparable necessity there of satisfying the requirements of a preannounced agenda, it is carried into effect in an unofficial, and consequently much less schematic, much less obtrusive, manner, being expressed for the most part as a silent, though pervasive, tendency to highlight differences

rather than similarities between 'equivalent' or near-equivalent terms. In the course of the ensuing study I shall be bringing forward a whole category of examples illustrative of this tendency (which in my view, to be sure, represents just one more manifestation of Johnson's imperative psychological 'drive to distinguish') whose evidential weight will, I believe, serve to bear out Kathleen Wales's seemingly paradoxical judgment (in which I concur) that the function of 'synonymy' in Johnson's oeuvre is, overall, "to show distinction rather than similarity" (26).

I hope that in the foregoing reconstruction I have managed to offer a plausible sketch of the nature and scope of Johnson's outlook on distinction-making; and, more to the point, that I have managed to suggest its importance to him by showing how it ministers to, or intersects with, some of his other pre-eminent concerns and assumptions. I should like to think that distinction-making was important to him for the reasons I have ventured, but in this matter certain knowledge is not to be hoped for because Johnson, being no systematic theoretician (as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter), never spelled them out. On the other hand, of his persuasion of the

necessity and importance of distinction-making (as distinct from his reasons for being so persuaded) there is no doubt. In this matter he makes his position sufficiently clear on a number of occasions, both in his conversation and in his writings.

In bringing forward evidence to support this claim, I have chosen as my examples passages that bear upon the two paramount, most searchingly explored areas of concern in Johnson's thinking and life-experience alike, the areas of morality and literature. Some of the examples fall more naturally into the domain of moral concerns, others more naturally into the domain of literary ones, and in a couple of instances the two domains overlap in a way that cogently dramatizes Johnson's conviction of literature's inseparableness from morality. The following three passages appear to have a predominantly literary bearing, though in the last a moral strand is woven into the literary skein:

> It is...the task of criticism to...distinguish those means of pleasing which depend upon known causes and rational deduction, from the nameless and inexplicable elegancies which appeal wholly to the fancy... (Rambler 92, IV 122)

> The care of the critic should be to distinguish error from inability, faults of inexperience from defects of nature. (Idler 25, II 79)
>
> It ought to be the first endeavour of a writer to distinguish nature from custom, or that which is established because it is right, from that which is right only because it is established. (Rambler 156, V 70)

In the ensuing examples a chiefly moral context is posited for distinction-making whose importance is enforced by means of negative reference - that is, the obliteration or confounding of necessary moral distinctions is viewed as criminal:

> There are, indeed, many among the poetical flatterers...whom we must confess to have deserted the cause of virtue for pay: they have committed, against full conviction, the crime of obliterating the distinctions between good and evil... (Rambler 104, IV 194)
>
> They who allow their passions to confound the distinctions between right and wrong, are criminal. (Life 749)

The final passage represents a particularly striking

instance of the overlap and interpenetration of literary and moral concerns:

> It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art, to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation: greater care is still required in representing life, which is so often discoloured by passion, or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination. ...
>
> Some have advanced...[the] notion that certain virtues have their correspondent faults, and therefore that to exhibit either apart is to deviate from probability. ...
>
> It is of the utmost importance to mankind, that positions of this tendency should be laid open and confuted; for while men consider good and evil as springing from the same root, they will spare the one for the sake of the other,

> and in judging, if not of others at least of themselves, will be apt to estimate their virtues by their vices. To this fatal error all those will contribute, who confound the colours of right and wrong, and instead of helping to settle their boundaries, mix them with so much art, that no common mind is able to disunite them. (Rambler 4, III 22, 23, 24)

It is evident from the foregoing pronouncements that Johnson could never be imagined as concurring in Wordsworth's disparaging estimate of the distinction-making faculty as nothing more than a "false secondary power" (The Prelude II 221). In this imagined contrariety of viewpoints with respect to the role and importance of distinction-making lies not a little of the difference, it seems to me, between Johnson and his age and Wordsworth and his.

* * *

"He was fond of discrimination". So said Sir Joshua Reynolds of Johnson (Life 585). Though one of his closest friends, Reynolds in this judgment strikes me as having

somewhat missed the mark. For Johnson was not so much fond of discrimination, it seems to me, as addicted to it - not morbidly but compulsively. It is for this reason that the title of this study alludes to his drive to distinguish, a claim which I hope the weight of evidence presented in the following pages will bear out.

Apropos of my contention that there is something compulsive about Johnson's distinction-making, it bears pointing out that one of the noteworthy aspects of the critics' treatment of him is the regularity with which features of his thought and conduct are viewed as compulsive or instinctive. Lord Macaulay, writing in 1831, spotlights his (superstitious?) compulsion to touch every streetpost he passed (II 543), while among twentieth-century critics W K Wimsatt notes a "mental...drive to assimilate ideas" (1941, viii), J P Hardy speaks of an "inner compulsion" to pursue hopes and desires despite a recognition of the vanity of all human wishes (61), Paul Fussell refers to his "instinct for genre and literary conventions" (1972:80) and to his "instinctive skepticism...of 'systems' and unambiguous positions" (1972:171), and Walter Jackson Bate remarks his "compulsive...drive to distil experience into the most

condensed generalization possible...into a final maxim..." (1955:22-23). Bate then is postulating the operation of a synthesizing, nucleating impulse in Johnson's mental make-up; the way I see it, his 'drive to distinguish' represents a kind of counterpoise to that: an equal, opposing and yet complementary impulse, as much analytical and bifurcating in its tendency as the other is combinative and incorporative[18].

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[18] To argue along these lines is to place Johnson in a Socratic context. I am thinking here of a passage in the Phaedrus where Socrates describes himself as "a lover of...divisions and collections" thanks to which he "gain[s] the power to speak and to think".

What are 'divisions' and 'collections'? The earlier part of the exchange tells us:

> SOCRATES: [W]e...allude[d] to a certain pair of procedures, and it would be very agreeable if we could seize their significance in a scientific fashion. PHAEDRUS: What procedures do you mean? SOCRATES: The first is that in which we bring a dispersed plurality under a single form, seeing it all together...PHAEDRUS: And what is the second procedure you speak of, Socrates? SOCRATES: The reverse of the other, whereby we are enabled to divide into forms...and continue to make divisions... (132-34)

The first-mentioned procedure is the one Socrates labels 'collection' (synagoge, "a bringing together"; in Jowett's translation (4th edn., III 174) rendered as "generalization"), the other is 'division' (diaeresis, partitio: "analysis", "logical division into parts"). Together these two procedures constitute the pillars upon which Socratic dialectic rests.

Now to project against this backdrop Johnson's complementary drives to synthesize and to separate is to bring immediately into view their resemblance to Socrates' 'collections' and 'divisions'. So there is certainly justification for situating him within a Socratic frame of reference, for seeing him in some wise as enrolled in a Socratic fraternity of 'lovers of divisions and collections'. In the present study it is of course exclusively Johnson's love of 'divisions' that comes under investigation.

Johnson as a virtuoso of genre-awareness and genre-discrimination

In seeking to track through Johnson's oeuvre the visible spoor left by the analytical and bifurcating impulse mentioned above, I want to begin by considering his extraordinary sensitivity to, and feel for, genre and genre-distinctions (or, to use Fussell's terminology, his "instinct for genre"). After that I shall move on to examine other manifestations of his distinction-making bent as they are expressed in the areas of ethics, ideas, verbal collocations, rhetorical figurations, philosophical schemata, and more.

In speaking of Johnson's sensitivity to, and feel for, genre, what I have in mind is his uncannily accurate and secure sense of the distinctive characteristics and conventions specific to an incredibly large number of literary Kinds. Of this sense the necessary corollary is an equally secure and finely-tuned feel for the differences between them[19], for how and where the generic lines of

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[19] Another way of stating this point is to say that one knows what any particular genre is only by virtue of having a very distinct feel for all the genres it is not. As Ralph Cohen puts it: "A genre cannot be defined by its own terms. It needs at least one other genre from which it can be distinguished" (in Perkins 97). There is a vivacious exchange in the Life which gestures towards this issue:

> GARRICK: What! eh! is Strahan a good judge of an Epigram? Is not he rather an obtuse man, eh? JOHNSON: Why, Sir, he may not be a judge of an Epigram: but you see he is a

separation run[20]. The underlying logic here is axiomatic - having a clear idea of the distinctive internal characteristics of discrete items necessarily means having a clear idea of how and where they differ from one another.

When we consider how many genres there were to keep track of, let alone master, in Johnson's day[21] (incomparably more than in our own which has witnessed the extinction, more or less, of genre-consciousness), and when

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judge of what is not an Epigram. (922) [emphasis in original]

The points at issue here bear upon, as they bear out, the Saussurian position that all meaning is comparative and differential - illustrative of which is this observation by Enkvist: "To feel the characteristically Shakespearean texture of a poetic passage we must have experienced both characteristically Shakespearean and characteristically non-Shakespearean poems. Otherwise how could we spot what makes Shakespeare stand out as Shakespeare?" (in Van Peer 127). In his "Preface to Shakespeare" Johnson makes the same point: "As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep or a mountain high, without the knowledge of many mountains and many rivers; so in the productions of genius, nothing can be stiled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind" (in Bronson 262).

[20] To be sure, a crucial enabling condition permitting Johnson and his contemporaries (no less than his predecessors) to feel secure about their 'feel' for generic difference was the virtually universal assumption, scarcely questioned from the Renaissance until towards the end of the eighteenth century, of generic fixity. As M H Abrams puts it: "Through the Renaissance and much of the eighteenth century, the recognized genres...were widely thought to be fixed literary types, somewhat like species in the biological order of nature" (1993:76).

[21] Johnson's activity as a writer "took place in the midst of a heady profusion and variety of genres. Indeed, to think of what an open, 'free' literary world would be like, a world where the available forms are almost numberless and infinitely variegated, is to imagine oneself in something like Johnson's literary circumstances" (Fussell (1972) 38). Later in his book Fussell offers this striking insight: "[Johnson's] literary character was made by the prevailing genres and by the accident that an age recognizing an abundance of genres brought forth a man who could work in an immense variety of almost ventriloquial stances and voices" (1972:88-89).

we consider in how many of them he excelled[22], it is not difficult to understand why he impresses as a kind of virtuoso of genre-awareness and genre-discrimination when viewed from the vantage point of our own age. Paul Fussell has been pre-eminent among critics in calling attention to the virtuoso, bravura aspect of Johnson's handling of the literary Kinds: "[Johnson] exercised himself, often anonymously, in more of the various literary 'kinds' than perhaps any other writer has ever done", he observes; and then he goes on to amplify this judgment circumstantially:

> Consider: he worked in tragedy, biography, the periodical essay, the oriental tale, the travel book, the political tract, the critical essay, and the book review; in the oration, the sermon,

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[22] Not only, to be sure, because his acquaintance with the generic choices and opportunities on offer in his day was so comprehensive, and his feel for so many of the Kinds so secure and finely tuned, but also because his literary sensibility was so multiform, his literary interests so varied and his literary activity, over a long career, so diversified. Of the range of Johnson's literary interests Robert Folkenflik remarks
that it is "one of the things that makes [him] most humanly admirable" (in Grundy (1984) 31-32).

Something that should not be lost sight of, when mention is made of the number of genres in which Johnson excelled, is that this applies not only to written forms but also to his conversation for, as Fussell points out, "[e]ven various kinds of conversations are genres, and in them as well as in written occasions [Johnson] senses the necessity of literary conventions" (1972:80). In an earlier footnote I cited Johnson's claim to always speak uniformly by endeavouring on every occasion to be as intelligible as possible (Life 598). But it is perfectly possible to be intelligible in a variety of styles, depending upon one's sense of occasion and audience. Such was the case with Johnson, no less in his conversation than in his writings: always intelligible, but in a variety of styles.

the letter[23], the prayer, the dedication, the

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[23] This genre is further differentiated in Johnson's practice into a number of sub-Kinds - business letters, letters of recommendation, petitionary letters written on behalf of an odd assortment of hard-luck cases, formal, stately letters addressed to the great, purely informative missives, circumstantial letters consisting of ephemera, and yet others. But with one or two celebrated exceptions (such as the famous letter to Lord Chesterfield), 'Johnson's Letters' mean, for most readers, his familiar letters, of which he wrote a great number, many no longer extant. With respect to these a few observations are in order.

There are essentially two ways, different but not contradictory, of looking at the familiar letters. Depending upon one's point of view, they may be visualized either en bloc, as a single entity, or, alternatively, as an assemblage of numerous finely discriminated strands. What the first perspective throws into relief is a gathering tendency, affecting the familiar correspondence as a whole, towards a more informal, spontaneous and intimate epistolary style. An aspect of, as it is a reason for, this increasing informality of style, is Johnson's achievement of "a feat of valediction that Pope and Chesterfield almost never attempt: shedding the obtrusive I am of the standard formula and incorporating the subscription, the noun phrase 'your humble servant/Sam. Johnson', into a sentence that performs some other function than valediction" (McIntosh 141). The tendency towards greater epistolary informality and spontaneity started coming into its own, argues Isobel Grundy ("Johnson's Developing Epistolary Style", in Korshin 216-17), in the mid-1750s; and it had the effect, over time, of accentuating the differences between Johnson's epistolary manner and all his others (Grundy, ibid. 217). So under this perspective the familiar correspondence, conceived of corporately, as a unit, is brought into juxtaposition with the rest of the Johnsonian oeuvre. Under the alternative perspective it is considered with reference to itself alone; and, thus considered, comes into view as an assemblage of many rather finely discriminated 'strands', each of which represents a different letter-style adopted by Johnson
in response to perceived differences of aptitude and sensibility among his principal addressees. What he contrives to do, in other words, is to fashion for each of them a customized sub-sub-genre of the familiar letter in accordance with his estimate of individual capacity and personality. The upshot of this is of course a very high degree of epistolary differentiation, a fact noted, with the prominence it deserves, by the editor of Johnson's Letters, R W Chapman:

> The extant letters...complement Johnson's published writings and his oral wisdom. His success in accommodating their matter and their manner to the character and abilities of his correspondents displays his versatility and the subtlety of his sympathies. The most interesting of his letters are, I think, those to Boswell [for Grundy the most interesting are the letters to Mrs Thrale - in Korshin 222]...The letters to Mrs Thrale are on a different plane...The letters to Queeny Thrale are just what an old man's letters should be, when he writes to a child or a growing girl.

preface, the legal brief, and the petition to royalty; in the poetic satire, the Horatian ode, the elegy, the theatrical prologue and epilogue, the song, the Anacreontic lyric, the epigram, and the epitaph. He was a master even of the advertisement[24], the political handbill, and the medical prescription. ...The only consequential

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> The ladies at Lichfield are nicely discriminated. To Lucy Porter Johnson is affectionate, but somewhat dictatorial; that 'peremptory maiden' had to be kept in her place. Miss Aston he treats as his intellectual equal. At the bottom of the scale comes John Taylor. If Johnson's letters to him are sometimes didactic to the point of dullness, that is as it should be; for Taylor was a slow-witted man, dull in himself and the cause of dullness in others. (I xix-xx)

The way Johnson handles his familiar correspondence certainly lends support to Voitle's contention that "he was always aware of the occasion, of his purposes, and of the nature of his audience" (ix). Mentioned here are three of the five conditions necessary for a high degree of genre-consciousness; they may be thought of as 'extrinsic' conditions. The 'intrinsic' ones are: a sure feel for the characteristics and conventions specific to the manifold literary Kinds, and its corollary, a sure feel for the differences between them. Johnson's proficiency in all five of these departments was total; hence his total mastery of genre.

[24] Fussell presumably is alluding to the literary advertisement; if so, it bears pointing out that Johnson was master not only of the literary advertisement but of the commercial advertisement too. Conceiving of it as a genre in its own right, he naturally viewed it as possessed of a body of rules specific to itself; some of these find quasi-ironic expression in an Idler essay (# 40):

> Promise, large promise, is the soul of an advertisement. ...But as every art ought to be exercised in due subordination to the publick good, I cannot but propose it as a moral question to these masters of the publick ear, whether they do not sometimes play too wantonly with our passions...
>
> In an advertisement it is allowed to every man to speak well of himself, but I know not why he should assume the privilege of censuring his neighbour. He may proclaim his own virtue or skill, but ought not to exclude others from the same pretensions. (II 125, 127)

> contemporary categories to which he never turned his hand were the novel, stage comedy, the Pindaric ode, and the pastoral. (1972:38-39)

A few examples will suffice to bring into focus the sureness and accuracy with which Johnson lays hold of what is essential and defining in some of the Kinds mentioned above (and also some not mentioned because, owing to reservations of one kind or another on his part, but certainly not because his acquaintance with their operative characteristics and conventions was anything less than complete, they were left unattempted). Take satire to begin with:

> [Johnson] repeated Pope's verses, in which 'Macedonia's madman' is introduced, and the conclusion is "Yet ne'er looks forward farther than his nose". I objected to the last phrase, as being low. JOHNSON: Sir, it is intended to be low: it is satire. The expression is debased, to debase the character. (Hebrides Journal 201)

Located at the opposite extreme from lowly satire in the eighteenth-century hierarchy of genres is exalted

epic[25], in treating of which Johnson's manner, reflecting the difference between conversational and written discourse, 'changes gear', becoming perceptibly more weighty and deliberate:

> By the general consent of criticks the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epick poem, as it requires an assemblage of all the powers which are singly sufficient for other compositions. Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason. Epick poetry undertakes to teach the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts, and therefore narrates some great event in the most affecting manner. History must supply the writer with the rudiments of narration, which he must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must animate by dramatick energy, and diversify by retrospection and anticipation... ("Milton", Lives I 170)

In Rambler 37, where Johnson brings pastoral poetry under scrutiny, his proceeding, moving as it does towards

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[25] "[T]he traditional hierarchy [ran] from epic at the top, through stage tragedy and comedy, to pastoral, elegy, 'lyric' - that is, Horatian and Pindaric odes - and, at the bottom, satire" (Tillotson et al. 11).

a formal definition of the genre, is perhaps even more deliberate than in the passage from "Milton" cited above. What also bears noticing is the way in which he explicitly and expressly draws attention to what is excluded by his definition of pastoral. All definitions, to be sure, as they stake out the ambit of their application, necessarily exclude what lies beyond it, but what is thus excluded is ordinarily left implicit, not, as in this case, deliberately underlined. Johnson's motive in being so explicit is to highlight the divergence between his view of pastoral and the one generally subscribed to in his day. Wishing to present the gist of the essay's argument, I have decided to slightly rearrange the order of its points for the purposes of this citation:

> In writing or judging of pastoral poetry, neither the authors nor criticks of latter times seem to have paid sufficient regard to the originals left us by antiquity, but have entangled themselves with unnecessary difficulties, by advancing principles, which, having no foundation in the nature of things, are wholly to be rejected from a species of composition in which, above all others, mere

nature is to be regarded.

It is, therefore, necessary to enquire after some more distinct and exact idea of this kind of writing. This may, I think, be easily found in the pastorals of Virgil...If we search the writings of Virgil, for the true definition of a pastoral, it will be found "a poem in which any action or passion is represented by its effects upon a country life." Whatsoever therefore may, according to the common course of things, happen in the country, may afford a subject for a pastoral poet. ...Pastoral...has nothing peculiar but its confinement to rural imagery, without which it ceases to be pastoral. This is its true characteristick, and this it cannot lose by any dignity of sentiment, or beauty of diction.

In this definition, it will immediately occur to those who are versed in the writings of the modern criticks, that there is no mention of the golden age. I cannot indeed easily discover why it is thought necessary to refer descriptions of a rural state to remote times,

> nor can I perceive that any writer has consistently preserved the Arcadian manners and sentiments... (III 200, 201, 204)

Now for three quite different Kinds - dedications, epitaphs and compliments. I group them together because they have in common the characteristic that allowance has to be made, by convention, for encomiastical hyperbole[26]: by 'the rules of the game', "'hyperbolic effusions' [are] expected of a dedicator" (Folkenflik in Grundy 31). In short, where these Kinds are concerned, no author is to be thought of as being under oath. Here are some examples of the way Johnson views them:

> Captain M'Lean censured Burnet, for his high praise of Lauderdale in a dedication, when he shews him in his history to have been so bad a man. JOHNSON: I do not myself think that a man should say in a dedication what he could not say in a history. However, allowance should be made; for there is a great difference. The known style of a dedication is flattery: it professes to flatter. (Hebrides Journal 333)

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[26] Just as, by convention, "[s]ome enlargement may be allowed to declamation, and some exaggeration to burlesque" (Rambler 208, V 320).

Agreed - but if the 'known style', that is, the conventions, of this Kind makes allowance for flattery, it does so only up to a certain limit. Johnson's sense of where that limit lies is unfailingly secure[27], and those who overstep it are therefore not long in being called to account for their trangression. One such transgressor is Richard Savage of whose Miscellany Johnson notes that

> The Dedication is addressed to the Lady Mary Wortley Montague, whom he flatters without reserve, and, to confess the truth, with very little art. The same observation may be extended to all his Dedications; his compliments are constrained [= strained, unnatural] and violent, heaped together without the grace of order, or the decency of introduction. ("Savage", Lives II 343)

As for the epitaph, "it is indeed commonly panegyrical, because we are seldom distinguished with a stone but by our friends; but...it ought not to be longer than common beholders may be expected to have leisure and

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[27] For that reason he is able to denounce as "indecent and promiscuous" (Rambler 136, IV 356) dedications that are disfigured by a level of flattery going beyond the limits of acceptability sanctioned by the conventions of the genre. Knowing whether and when flattery oversteps permissible limits and becomes 'indecent and promiscuous' depends, as a precondition, upon knowing that there are limits, and knowing also where they lie.

patience to peruse" ("Pope", Lives III 254). With regard to the object of the beholder's perusal - the inscription itself - the convention, of which nobody was expected to be ignorant, stipulated that

> The writer of an epitaph should not be considered as saying nothing but what is strictly true. Allowance must be made for some degree of exaggerated praise. In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath. (Life 662)

No more is he when it comes to the compliment, a genre which extends to the reader or listener a formulaic, conventional invitation, just as the dedication and the epitaph do, to make due allowance for hyperbolical commendation - as Johnson, dissenting from Goldsmith's opinion, points out:

> Goldsmith [had] said that Garrick's compliment to the Queen, which he introduced into the play of The Chances...was mean and gross flattery. JOHNSON: Why, Sir, I would not write, I would not give solemnly under my hand, a character beyond what I thought really true; but a speech on the stage, let it flatter ever so extravagantly, is formular. It has always been

formular to flatter Kings and Queens[28]. (Life

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[28] From one point of view there is nothing at all surprising about Johnson's insistence that in dedications, epitaphs and compliments one should neither expect nor demand the kind of scrupulous adherence to the truth that in real life one would feel justified in requiring as a matter of course. This kind of attitude seems to be entirely consistent with what one might expect from somebody as profoundly conscious as Johnson was of the claims, character and conventions of genre in general and of individual genres in particular. Still, from another point of view, there is something rather surprising, something not entirely in line with expectation, about Johnson's asking us to say amen to deviations from strict truthfulness - or, to put it bluntly, prevarication - in the three Kinds mentioned above. The occasion of surprise is the fact, attested from many quarters, that when it came to respect for the truth nobody was more exigent than Johnson in the demands he made both of himself and of others. A representative judgment in this connection is that of Arthur Murphy, a friend of the Sage and the author of a Johnsonian memoir published in 1792. In this work Murphy relates that Johnson regarded

> A strict adherence to the truth...as a sacred obligation insomuch that in relating the most minute anecdote he would not allow himself the smallest addition to embellish his story. The late Mr Tyers who knew Johnson intimately observed, "that he always talked as if he was talking on oath." (in Hill, I 458) [v. also Life 686, 900; likewise Rambler 136: "...no private views or personal regard can discharge any man from his general obligations to virtue and to truth" (IV 359)]

Given a dedication to truthfulness as single-minded and fastidious as this, there is indeed occasion for some surprise at Johnson's willingness to let dedications, epitaphs and literary compliments live by their own generic law (that is, be self-referential) instead of requiring them to conform to extrinsic standards of truthfulness brought to bear from the arena of real life. How are we to account for such forbearance (for forbearance it seems to be)?

There are certainly grounds for hypothesizing that Johnson, as the first genuine English man of letters, had the interests of literature (subsumed under which are those of genre) too much at heart to permit norms applicable to the conduct of life, including that of truthfulness, to be indiscriminately foisted upon it. Keeping literature and life apart, he rendered to each its due. Accordingly, if he concedes to dedications, epitaphs and literary compliments the right to live by their own essentially prevaricating generic law, he does so on the clear understanding that in the conduct of life an altogether more exigent code of truthfulness holds sway. But this hypothesis, even if there is any merit in it, cannot amount to anything more than a very partial explanation. For given Johnson's over-riding concern with the moral dimension of existence, he cannot easily be imagined as willing to let the three Kinds under discussion live by their own canting law if he were not confident that not only he but anyone having to do with them could be relied upon to perceive that they were convention-governed, to know by which conventions they

were governed, hence to read the conventional cues aright, and as a result be trusted not to view the liberties taken with the truth in the Kinds under discussion as an invitation and encouragement to do the same thing in life. In a word, what we are talking about is genre-literacy, and in the eighteenth century it was possible, to a degree not to be contemplated in our own, to feel confident that any likely reader of dedications, epitaphs and literary compliments would be sufficiently genre-literate to construe them correctly and so avoid placing his moral being in jeopardy by permitting a carry-over from literature into life. If Johnson had not felt confident about the genre-competence of those of his contemporaries who were likely to come within range of these three Kinds, he would not have been willing, despite his respect for the claims of genre, to be as forbearing towards them as he was; under those circumstances he would probably have demanded from them standards of truthfulness approximating those applicable in real life. All this is just another way of saying that his moral concerns would have been in the end the determining factor, over-riding all competing considerations.

Lending support to the argumentative position I am developing is this fact: when it comes to the novel and the stage drama Johnson displays nothing like the forbearance that characterizes his attitude towards the three Kinds mentioned above. He adopts instead a prescriptive, stipulative, interventionist stance: refusing to concede to the novel and the stage drama the right of self-referentiality, he requires them instead to discharge an instrumental role as agents of moral improvement. The question to which this contrast in attitudes gives rise is the obvious one: how are we to account for it? In seeking to do so, I propose to focus on two factors which strike me as being of decisive importance. The first concerns the status of the novel and the stage drama in the eighteenth-century, the second their habitual mode of operation. With regard to the first factor the essential point is this - that the novel and the stage drama were in the eighteenth century what they are today - 'mass' genres, though comparatively less so then than now. What this state of affairs, as seen from Johnson's point of view, would have implied was an alarmingly high rate of genre-illiteracy among the audiences to which novels and plays appealed. And once it was no longer possible to entertain, with any confidence, an assumption of genre-literacy, once novel-readers and theatregoers could not be relied upon to know the conventions of these Kinds, and thus construe correctly the conventional cues, it followed that they could not be relied upon to know how to protect themselves against the dangers - chiefly moral - of a carry-over from literature into life. So (trying here to reconstruct Johnson's probable perception of the situation), we have on the one hand audiences that are susceptible, suggestible and defenceless. On the other, working in conjunction with this first factor and magnifying its potential for harm, was a second - the fact that by 'the rules of the game' novels and plays are in the business of representing the fictive 'worlds' they construct as authentic projections of the real one. Because these projections are often very realistic and because fictive and dramatic strategies are often highly manipulative, it follows that these two Kinds have at their command a power to persuade, indeed, to seduce, that no dedication, epitaph, or

literary compliment can even remotely be imagined as exerting, even upon an audience ignorant of the 'rules of the game'. If to the foregoing factors we add another - Johnson's conviction that the persuasive powers of novels and plays were as often mobilized for wicked ends as for good - the picture that emerges is of susceptible, suggestible, defenceless 'receptors' (to use a current 'term of art') at the mercy of powerfully persuasive, even powerfully seductive, texts, not a few with a corrupting tendency. If we bear in mind how alarming, from a moral standpoint, this state of affairs must have seemed to Johnson, is it any wonder, given the primacy of moral concerns in his outlook, that his attitude to plays and novels should have turned out to be as morally prescriptive and morally interventionist as it did? There would be cause for wonder, indeed, only if matters had fallen out differently, if he had adopted an attitude much (or even not much) different from the one he in fact did adopt.

As far as the stage drama is concerned, the best-known example of Johnson's moral prescriptiveness is his censure of Shakespeare for a want of moral purpose, moral firmness and moral clarity in his plays - in a word, a want of moral commitment:

> His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected...but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place. ("Preface to Shakespeare" in Bronson 271)

At the end of the passage Johnson adopts an explicitly prescriptive posture; prior to that it is only implicitly so. But the positive stipulation lying behind his mainly negative observations is not difficult to descry: the clear suggestion is that Shakespeare ought to have recognized an obligation in his oeuvre to take an unambiguous stand in support of virtue.

A parallel inference may be drawn from his censure of Congreve's plays, "the general tenour and tendency of [which] must always be condemned." For

> It is acknowledged with universal conviction that the perusal of his works will make no man better; and that their ultimate effect is to represent pleasure in alliance with vice, and to relax those obligations by which life ought to be regulated. ("Congreve", Lives II 222)

The locus classicus for Johnson's standpoint on the moral responsibilities - almost, one could say, the moral calling - of fiction is a celebrated Rambler essay (# 4) whose argumentative mode

is forcefully and unapologetically prescriptive and stipulative. Fiction, argues Johnson, is under a clear obligation to discharge a double-sided moral task (to judge from the tone of his writing, it could with equal propriety be designated a moral trust): on the one hand there is a negative requirement to satisfy, that of being careful to give no aid or comfort to evil by, for example, painting it in attractive colours; on the other, there is also a positive responsibility laid upon the author of fiction, that of actively ranging himself on the side of good. What follows, by way of evidential support for the preceding assertions, is a mosaic of excerpts culled from Rambler 4 (I hope the thrust of Johnson's argument survives the need for abridgment):

> These books [the fiction of Johnson's day] are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account. ...The purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence...to give the power of counteracting fraud, without the temptation to practise it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defence, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue. ...Vice, for vice is necessary to be shewn, should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the mind. Wherever it appears, it should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and contempt by the meanness of its stratagems. ...It is therefore to be steadily inculcated, that virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness; and that vice is the natural consequence of narrow thoughts, that it begins in mistake, and ends in ignominy. (I 21, 22-23, 24, 25)

Relying on little or no evidence beyond the "Preface to Shakespeare" and the Rambler essay cited above, critics have come to view Johnson's treatment of genre as little more than a straightforward exercise in moral prescriptivism and interventionism: subjecting the Kinds to an extrinsic law, he assigns to them an instrumental role as agents of moral betterment. In undertaking the lengthy argument elaborated above, my purpose has been to suggest that this very widespread perception is unsound and superficial. The truth is that Johnson's position is a good deal more complex than it has anywhere previously (to my knowledge) been given credit for. I have endeavoured to bring that complexity into view by showing that the stance he adopts towards genres like the dedication, the epitaph and the literary compliment (whose evidential value has up to now been ignored) is quite different from the stance adopted towards the novel

526) [emphasis in original] .

That Johnson has so firm, distinct and exact a sense of what is defining and essential in a very large number of genres necessarily implies, as I argued above, as firm and exact a sense of the differences between them; and this in turn involves an exceptionally precise feel for just those crucial traits that are determinative in genre differentiation[29], in particular differentiation between genres 'near allied'. The examples which follow testify

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and the stage drama. I have sought to account for the difference in attitude by advancing the hypothesis that the different kinds of audience Johnson envisioned for the different genre-clusters authorized, if they did not indeed dictate, an assumption of divergent levels of genre-competence; and that this assumption of unequal competence in its turn dictated differing attitudes to, and different destinies for, the different genres - dictated, in other words, a differential 'genre policy'. Hence, where Johnson felt able to assume an adequate level of genre-competence, he felt correspondingly able to indulge an attitude of forbearance, allowing the Kinds in question to live by their own law. Where, however, as in the case of fiction and drama, he felt he could not make any such assumption, it was only natural (meaning, only logical) that he should then feel constrained to adopt an interventionist and prescriptive stance, denying autonomy and self-referentiality to novels and plays and requiring them instead to perform an instrumental office within the moral domain. Why the moral domain? Because the assumptions and determinations Johnson makes in the area of 'genre policy', as in every area that has a bearing upon his system of beliefs, have to be viewed as functioning within the context of, indeed, as controlled by, one great fundamental given - the centrality and primacy of his moral preoccupations. With respect to which nothing he said or wrote is as impressive, or moving, as the final lines of the final Rambler:

> I shall never envy the honours which wit and learning obtain in any other cause, if I can be numbered among the writers who have given ardour to virtue, and confidence to truth. (V 320)

[29] In other words - those of the vocabulary of formal logic - what Johnson lays hold of is the "differentia", that is, "the attribute by which a species is distinguished from all other species of the same genus; a distinguishing mark or characteristic" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edn.).

to his aptitude for homing in on traits of determinative importance as a basis for distinguishing between genres. Consider, for a start, the following instance in which he differentiates between comedy and farce:

> BOSWELL: Foote [the comic actor] ...has a singular talent of exhibiting character.
> JOHNSON: Sir, it is not a talent; it is a vice; it is what others abstain from. It is not comedy, which exhibits the character of a species, as that of a miser gathered from many misers: it is farce, which exhibits individuals. (Life 417)

With the same proficiency he lays hold of the essential difference between epitaph and elegy:

> In writing epitaphs, one circumstance is to be considered, which affects no other composition; the place in which they are now commonly found restrains them to a particular air of solemnity, and debars them from the admission of all lighter or gayer ornaments. In this it is, that the style of an epitaph necessarily differs from that of an elegy. ...All allusions to the heathen mythology are, therefore, absurd. (in

Grundy (1984) 187)

In the following judgment bearing upon Akenside's poetical productions, Johnson pinpoints precisely those characteristics that crucially differentiate the lighter from the grander ode:

> It is not easy to guess why he addicted himself so diligently to lyrick poetry, having neither the ease and airiness of the lighter, nor the vehemence and elevation of the grander ode. ("Akenside", Lives III 419)

As Johnson tilts at Dr William Robertson's History of Scotland, his censure evolves into a distinction between history and romance based precisely on the trait that is determinative in keeping these two Kinds separate from each other:

> JOHNSON: ...doubtless, Goldsmith's History is better than the verbiage of Robertson, or the foppery of Dalrymple. BOSWELL: Will you not admit the superiority of Robertson, in whose History we find such penetration - such painting? JOHNSON: Sir, you must consider how that penetration and that painting are employed. It is not history, it is imagination. He who

> describes what he never saw, draws from fancy. Robertson paints minds as Sir Joshua paints faces in a history-piece: he imagines an heroic countenance. You must look upon Robertson's work as romance, and try it by that standard. History it is not[30]. (Life 527-28) [emphasis in original]

Distinguishing between encomiastic and biographical writing, Johnson highlights considerations that somewhat intersect with the concerns of the passage cited just above, while at the same time recalling his 'angle' on Dedications:

> The Life of Cowley...has been written by Dr Sprat, an author whose...zeal of friendship, or ambition of eloquence, has produced a funeral oration rather than a history: he has given the character, not the life of Cowley; for he writes

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[30] Cf. Johnson's letter to Boswell dated 9 September 1769:

> Dear Sir
>
> Why do you charge me with unkindness? I have omitted nothing that could do you good, or give you pleasure, unless it be that I have forborne to tell you my opinion of your account of Corsica. ...Your History [a projected History of Corsica] is like other histories, but your Journal [the Account of Corsica] is in a very high degree curious and delightful. There is between the history and the journal that difference which there will always be found between notions borrowed from without, and notions generated within. Your history was copied from books; your journal rose out of your own experience and observation. (in Chapman I 230)

with so little detail that scarcely any thing is distinctly known, but all is shown confused and enlarged through the mist of panegyrick. ("Cowley", Lives I 1)

And, on the same theme, a passage from the Life:

...I well remember that Dr. Johnson maintained that 'If a man is to write A Panegyrick, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write A Life, he must represent it really as it was': and when I objected to the danger of telling that Parnell drank to excess, he said that 'it would produce an instructive caution to avoid drinking, when it was seen, that even the learning and genius of Parnell could be debased by it'. (840) [emphasis in original]

My final example exhibits Johnson as a real virtuoso of genre-discrimination: using three-way differentiation, followed by analogical demonstration, he undertakes to rescue the genre of the Pamphlet from misconception and misconstruction; in doing which he places the Pamphlet in its proper relation to both poetry and prose:

I happened, I know not how, to say that a pamphlet meant a prose piece. JOHNSON: No, Sir.

A few sheets of poetry unbound are a pamphlet, as much as a few sheets of prose[31]. MUSGRAVE: A pamphlet may be understood to mean a poetical piece in Westminster-Hall, that is, in formal language; but in common language it is understood to mean prose. JOHNSON: (and here was one of the many instances of his knowing clearly and telling exactly how a thing is) A pamphlet is understood in common language to mean prose, only from this, that there is so much more prose written than poetry; as when we say a book, prose is understood for the same

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[31] In his Dictionary Johnson defines "pamphlet" as "A small book; properly a book sold unbound and only stitched". In his own practice, needless to say, he used this word with lexicographic exactitude and correctness - decades before becoming a lexicographer. In an early poem, dating from 1729 (when he was only twenty), Johnson presents a sketch of an aspiring young author impetuously - and ill-fatedly - pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of literary renown. Entitled "The Young Author", the poem contains these lines:

> This thought [of fame] once form'd, all counsel comes too late,
> He plies the press,and hurries on his fate;
> Swiftly he sees the imagin'd laurels spread,
> He feels th'unfading wreath surround his head;
> .....
> The pamphlet spreads, incessant hisses rise,
> To some retreat the baffled writer flies...
>
> (Poems VI 73) [my emphasis]

As Johnson here uses the word "pamphlet" in its precise and punctual sense (a sense according with the later Dictionary definition), there is (quite properly) no way of knowing whether what it contains is prose or poetry; it could be either. As it is a 'pamphlet', what is at issue is not its content but its format.

> reason, though a book may as well be in poetry as in prose. We understand what is most general, and we name what is less frequent. (Life 968) [emphasis in original]

* * *

Johnson as a maker of distinctions in a variety of domains: ethical, philosophical, conceptual, verbal, rhetorical, functional, pictorial.

In the pages that follow I propose to take stock of Dr Johnson as the begetter of no fewer than seventeen identifiably different types of distinction, each of which serves as the organizing principle for a separate category of distinction-making. When I say that each distinction-type serves as an 'organizing principle', I mean by this that it assembles items on the basis of a given attribute shared in common by all of them (to exemplify: one of my categories consists of items unified by the attribute I have labelled 'Distinctions by appeal to Analogy'; another is unified by the trait 'Distinctions by way of Denial/Exclusion followed by Affirmation', and so forth). The upshot of this mode of organization has been the

emergence of seventeen separate categories, each consisting of items unified by a shared attribute - a condition that satisfies the first fundamental law of all classification, the law, as Richardson formulates it, of the "putting together of like things"(1). Since, however, the seventeen organizing traits all differ among themselves, it follows that even as each unifies the items within its own category, it simultaneously differentiates them from those in every other. Thus it is that the categories themselves, in their ensemble, come to be differentiated one from another and each from all; and the dynamic as a whole, the full picture, in its interplay of likeness within, and unlikeness between, categories satisfies the second fundamental law of classification which states that "Classification assembles things according to their degrees of likeness and separates them according to their degrees of unlikeness" (Sayers 20). So in theory, at any rate, my scheme of categorization appears to satisfy two of the principal requirements of sound classification.

With a view to facilitating the organizational coherence and clarity of the ensuing analysis, I have decided to sort the seventeen separate categories (which as they stand are already differentially tagged by means

of brief descriptive titles) into seven larger 'thematic' groupings or clusters. (To two of these, the ones I have labelled 'Ethical' and 'Pictorial', only one category has been assigned, so that in these two instances grouping and category are coterminous). The names I have chosen for the larger groupings appear in the title-heading of this section. Having constituted the larger clusters, I shall consider each in turn in the discussion that follows.

Before doing so, however, I need to enter a number of caveats. To begin with, it bears pointing out that a sizable number of individual items (that is, individual instances of distinction-making) manifest category-straddle, and so their allocation to the category they are in rather than to another may seem something of a puzzle. The difficulty here arises in the main from this circumstance: that as the various categories evolved and sorted themselves out, they did so to a not inconsiderable degree with reference to whether a prospective item was distinguished more by its subject-matter (content) or by its structure (form) - a circumstance reflected in the decidedly subject-matter-based character of some categories and, by contrast, the decidedly structure-based character

of others[32]. In a significant number of cases, however, it was a real question whether a prospective item stood out more by reason of its subject-matter or more by reason of its structure, and it was therefore very much of a toss-up which category had the best claim to it[33]. Most of the difficult decisions about how and where to allocate arose, not surprisingly, in relation to these equivocal or, to use an alternative term, 'hermaphroditic' items. Nevertheless, as choices had to be made one way or the other, I made them, and allocated accordingly, though such choices, in the very nature of the case, were incapable of actually 'settling' anything, since whatever decision one made,

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[32] To exemplify: 'Distinctions of Ideas' is, for the most part, a subject-matter-based category; by contrast, 'Distinctions by way of Offering Alternatives' (modelled often on the schema "...either...or...") is, for the most part, a structure-based one.

It is necessary to add that two categories are made up of items in which neither subject-matter nor structure stands out as prominently as function. These, then, are the function-based categories and they are mustered under the 'thematic' head I have labelled 'Functional'.

[33] Consider, as an example, the following item: "Great numbers who quarrel with their condition...have never contemplated the difference between good and evil sufficiently to quicken aversion, or invigorate desire" (Rambler 178, V 176).

Though this statement brings into focus an ethical distinction between good and evil, it does so on the basis of a recognizably philosophical configuration, that of the schema 'attraction vs. repulsion' (itself a permutation of the positive< >negative opposition, which may be thought of as an organizing, or 'master', schema). So this is an item which in principle could be assigned, with equal justification, either to the subject-matter-based category designated 'Distinctions Bearing on Moral Concerns' or to the structure-based one designated 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata'. In the end I decided to allocate it to the former, though, truth to tell, it had originally been assigned to the latter - which only serves to dramatize its ambivalent quality.

meaning, whatever category one eventually decided on for an equivocal item, the result was the same: category-over-reach and category-straddle, so far as that item was concerned. The best I could do, under the circumstances, was to try to palliate an 'unavoidable evil' by assigning a problematic item to the category which (in my judgment) it over-reached the least. However, as determinations made under conditions of near-undecidability are liable to be both fuzzy and disputable, it is hardly to be wondered at that to a different pair of eyes some of my category-choices may appear to be puzzling indeed. Nevertheless, in light of the backdrop I have adumbrated, it is not unreasonable to hope (I hope), that where puzzling category allocations are met with, they will at least not be ascribed to inattention or caprice: my category determinations <u>were</u> thought through; that much at any rate I can claim for them. At the same time of course I fully recognize that someone else appraising the same data as I did might think things through in a different way and so decide on a different pattern of allocation.

Second: in much the same way as some individual items straddle categories, so some individual categories straddle some of the larger groupings, and their being assigned to

one rather than to another may be a cause of puzzlement similar to that occasioned by some of my category determinations for individual items. As far as the interplay between the individual categories and the larger groupings is concerned, much of the uncertainty about which grouping to assign a given category to is attributable to the fact that the lines of division between some of the larger groupings (and also, for that matter, between some of the individual categories) are themselves somewhat uncertain, somewhat blurred. Take, for example, the partition I erect between the groupings I have labelled 'Conceptual' and 'Verbal': in a sense this is a purely artificial division since it is a real question whether there can be anything 'conceptual' which is not at the same time 'verbal'. Similarly, can there be anything 'philosophical' which is not at the same time 'conceptual'? So what justification is there for positing two separate groupings bearing the designations 'Conceptual' and 'Philosophical'? Though these are hard questions, I believe nevertheless that there do exist differences (to be outlined at the appropriate juncture) between the larger groupings (at any rate, as I make use of them in this inquiry) that both explain and justify the determinations

I have made as to where and how the lines of partition should be drawn. When all is said and done, though, what is at stake here - that is, the question of where the lines of partition among the larger groupings are drawn and whether they are drawn distinctly enough - is not really an issue of decisive importance since the sorting of the individual categories into larger clusters is, to begin with, just an aid to intelligible organization, not a precondition for it. For the purposes of the present inquiry it is sufficient if the grounds of differentiation among the seventeen separate categories stand out with reasonable clarity; if those among the seven larger groupings do too, that's by way of being a bonus.

The problem of the lines of separation between the larger groupings (and, if and where this applies, between the individual categories as well) not standing out as distinctly as they might, is also, to a degree, a problem of naming - of finding, for groupings and categories alike, designations sufficiently exact and sufficiently informative not only to convey an idea of the character of the items mustered under each but also to bring into view those essential grounds of difference between them (that is, between the categories among themselves, and between

the larger groupings, also among themselves) in virtue of which after all they assert their claim, in the first place, to subsist as separate, independent entities. Given the necessity for the briefest of descriptive tags to characterize my seven 'thematic' groupings, the problem I ran into was that I just could not come up with designations more denotative than the ones I eventually settled on, fully aware though I was of their inadequacy to the task of bringing out clearly those significant differences upon which their claim to independent status ultimately rests. The descriptive tags affixed to the seventeen individual categories are, by contrast, longer and more cumbersome but for that very reason more informative and thus better able to bring into focus the differences that vindicate their claim to separate status. Carlyle was no doubt right in affirming that "knowledge consists in the giving of right names to things" (in Sayers 6). On this criterion I have reason to wonder by how much I have advanced the cause of knowledge through the names I have given my categories and groupings; another intelligence might consider that cause better served by different names. So in the end I may have to rely on my examples to do the work that my names perhaps don't - that

is, bring into view the differences responsible for producing separate categories and separate groupings of categories. In other words, I may find myself having to proceed by the ostensive method[34]. If this proceeding is something of a second-best choice, at least I have good warrant for falling back on it - Dr Johnson's own practice: for when, as sometimes happens in the Dictionary, he finds himself at his wits' end about how to define a word, he is driven, in the absence of any alternative, to proceed ostensively - that is, to rely on examples to perform the office of elucidation that definition is no longer equal to[35].

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[34] "**ostensive definition**: the explanation of a word by pointing at...or by presenting, one or more objects to which it applies" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edition).

[35] In this connection the following remarks by DeMaria are germane:

> In a few cases, Johnson gives up and resorts to foreign languages to get around the problem of definition. ...More often, however, [he] depends upon his examples to take care of hard definitions, and he has a predilection for examples that point out the complexity of a word and the resultant difficulty for the lexicographer. Under the first sense of "to bear", for instance, Johnson says simply, "This is a word used with such latitude, that it is not easily explained," and he cites Watts: "We say to bear a burden, to bear sorrow or reproach, to bear a name, to bear a grudge, to bear fruit, or to bear children. The word bear is used in very different senses". (in Korshin 167-68) [emphasis in original]

In his "Preface" to the Dictionary Johnson is in fact perfectly frank in acknowledging that where his explanations fail to shed as much light as they should, the only available remedy for the deficiency is the ostensive one of turning to examples for help. He writes: "The solution of all difficulties, and the supply of all defects, must be sought in the examples, subjoined to the various senses of each word" (in Bronson 248).

Third: in a few of my categories, it may appear that the requirement of 'likeness', with respect to the items of which they are made up, has been rather laxly complied with. For example, the category I designate 'Distinctions of Ideas' assembles a congeries of quite disparate classes of ideas - moral, religious, literary, social, scientific and political (among others). In this connection, however, what needs to be borne in mind is that the theory of classification does not demand mathematical standards of likeness. Likeness is not sameness; insofar as likeness implies identity, it is "identity in kind...not in substance" (Richardson 3). Accordingly, the requirements of 'likeness' are complied with when items in a category are similar in kind, as mine are in being all 'distinctions of ideas', regardless of the various classes of ideas involved. It is indeed a matter of some importance that 'likeness' implies identity in kind and not in substance for it is this that creates enough 'room for manoeuvre' to permit the third fundamental law of classification to take its place alongside the other two. This law states that in any grouping of items, the <u>purpose</u> for which the grouping is intended should be determinative (Sayers 17, 29). Well, as my purpose in the category labelled

'Distinctions of Ideas' (to go back to that example) is, first and foremost, to demonstrate the fact, the activity, of Johnson's distinction-making mindset rather than to exhibit the various classes of ideas to which it gives rise, it follows that it would be perfectly pointless, in light of that objective, to undertake any further sub-categorization by class of the ideas there represented. In sum, the construction of an efficacious, serviceable scheme of classification involves not just putting in place that structure of likeness within, and unlikeness between, categories, indispensable though it be, but doing so with reference to a specific guiding purpose. It is on this basis that I have endeavoured to frame the classificatory scheme underpinning the remainder of this inquiry.

With the preliminaries out of the way, it is time to move on to a consideration of the seventeen categories of distinction-making as arranged under their respective 'thematic' heads. The one I propose to examine first bears the designation 'Ethical'.

Ethical Distinction-making

Subsumed under this head is the category I have christened 'Distinctions Bearing on Moral Concerns'. The

'moral concerns' informing the distinctions on which this category is structured are those of good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong, justice and injustice, and sins and faults of omission or commission.

But before I bring forward the hard evidence - the actual instances - of Johnson's ethical distinction-making, it is well to call attention to the importance he attached to the necessity, the obligation, indeed, to be at all times heedful of moral distinctions, and in particular the distinction between good and evil. He ordinarily draws attention to this obligation by implicit means, in the main using the technique of negative reference to enforce his point - that is to say, the technique of highlighting the culpability of those who are disregardful of their obligation[36]:

> To scatter praise or blame without regard to justice, is to destroy the distinction of good and evil. ...It is therefore not only necessary [if the distinction is to be rehabilitated] that wickedness...be denied applause, but that goodness be commended only in proportion to its

[36] An instance of Johnson's using the method of positive reference crops up in the Life of Collins who earns praise for having "never confounded" the "distinctions of right and wrong" (Lives III 338).

degree... (Rambler 136, IV 355-56)

If in the passage above it is culpability that Johnson focuses on, elsewhere he views disregard for the 'distinction of good and evil' as a species of criminality:

> They who allow their passions to confound the distinctions between right and wrong, are criminal. (Life 749)
>
> There are, indeed, many among the poetical flatterers...whom we must confess to have deserted the cause of virtue for pay: they have committed, against full conviction, the crime of obliterating the distinctions between good and evil...[37] (Rambler 104, IV 194)

That Johnson is prepared to use terms as stigmatizing as 'criminal' and 'crime' to characterize disregard of 'the distinctions between good and evil' testifies to the depth and strength of his belief in the importance of being heedful of them, however great the provocation, or temptation, to dereliction. This is so much the case, indeed, that he is brought, by logical necessity, to affirm

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[37] This citation and the preceding one featured earlier in this chapter where they formed part of the evidence supporting the larger point of Johnson's perception of distinction-making as a generally important human activity exercising itself in a variety of domains, not just the moral one.

that "it is better to suffer wrong than to do it, and happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust" (Rambler 79, IV 55).

Moving on now to Johnson's ethical distinction-making as such, I want to begin by drawing attention to a schema, or formula, for distinguishing between good and evil to which he appears to be especially partial. Under this schema good and evil are discriminated by being played off against each other in terms of an implicit opposition between positive good (i.e. the active pusuit of good) and 'negative good' (i.e. resistance to, or avoidance, or prevention of, evil). Here are some examples:

> All severity that does not tend to increase good, or prevent evil, is idle. (Life 687)
>
> Almighty God...enlighten my understanding with knowledge of right...that I may always endeavour to do good, and to hinder evil. (Prayers I 98)
>
> It is reasonable to suppose that Addison counteracted, as far as he was able, the malignant and blasting influence of the Lieutenant, and that at least by his intervention some good was done, and some mischief prevented. ("Addison", Lives II 90)

Poverty takes away so many means of doing good, and produces so much inability to resist evil...that it is by all virtuous means to be avoided. Consider a man whose fortune is very narrow...what good can he do? Or what evil can he prevent? (Life 1185)

In later ages, the conviction of the danger to which virtue is exposed while the mind continues open to the influence of riches, has determined many to vows of perpetual poverty; they have suppressed desire by cutting off the possibility of gratification...But by debarring themselves from evil, they have rescinded many opportunities of good... (Rambler 131, IV 335)

[So - to play off the preceding citation against this one - if ordinary poverty is granted few opportunities of resisting evil, monastic poverty is granted few of performing it (while at the same time, like ordinary poverty, being granted few of doing good)]

Great numbers who quarrel with their condition...have never contemplated the difference between good and evil sufficiently to

quicken aversion, or invigorate desire. (Rambler 178, V 176) [This item is simultaneously an instance of a distinction modelled on a philosophical schema: v. footnote 31 above]

Now destroying the authority of the [Highland] chiefs set the people loose. It did not pretend to bring any positive good, but only to cure some evil. (Hebrides Journal 260)

...but the innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature. They seem to think that we are placed here to watch the growth of plants, or the motions of the stars. Socrates was rather of opinion that what we had to learn was, how to do good, and avoid evil. ("Milton", Lives I 100)

This last example is of particular interest because its pivotal words 'how to do good and avoid evil' are not the ones Johnson originally set down on his page. We know from Boswell's lists of "Vari[ant] Readings" included in the Life that the words which originally filled the place now occupied by 'do good and avoid evil' were "obtain and communicate happiness" (1097). The change Johnson made to

his text strikes me as significant and revealing - revealing of a dual impulse: first, to prefer the forceful distinction to alternative locutions and, second, to formulate it in unmistakably moral terms.

A refinement on the distinction between good and evil is the distinction between the proportions, or comparative degrees, of good and ill, as in the following examples:

> Dr Johnson never went to see Dr Dodd [in prison]. He said to me, 'it would have done <u>him</u> more harm, than good to Dodd...' (<u>Life</u> 832) [emphasis in original]
>
> Talking of biography, I said, in writing a life, a man's peculiarities should be mentioned... JOHNSON: Sir, there is no doubt as to peculiarities: the question is, whether a man's vices should be mentioned; for instance, whether it should be mentioned that Addison and Parnell drank too freely: for people will probably more easily indulge in drinking from knowing this; so that more ill may be done by the example than good by telling the whole truth. (<u>Life</u> 839-40)

Highlighting the distinction between sins of omission and commission are these words, spoken by Rasselas:

> "Surely", said the prince, "my father must be negligent of his charge, if any man in his dominions dares take that which belongs to another. Does he not know that kings are accountable for injustice permitted as well as done?" (in Bronson 622)

Given that one is apt to become particularly conscious of wrongs of omission and commission when casting up a reckoning of one's life, and considering that Johnson accorded himself exceptional scope for soul-searchings and self-reckonings through his habit of prayer, and more particularly through his practice of composing prayers and meditations at specific times of the year (among others, Easter Day and his birthday), it comes as no surprise to discover among his numerous productions in this line not a few in which he records perceived wrongs of omission and commission, and plays them off against each other. Here are a couple of examples:

> Almighty and most merciful Father...have mercy upon me. I have committed many crimes. I have neglected many duties. I have done what Thou hast forbidden, and left undone what thou hast commanded... (Prayers I 139)

Jan. 23. 1759. The day on which my dear Mother was buried...

Almighty God, merciful Father, in whose hands are life and death... Forgive me whatever I have done unkindly to my Mother, and whatever I have omitted to do kindly... (Prayers I 66)

Playing off virtue against vice, Johnson brings into focus some important differences between them:

...though there are few who will practise a laborious virtue, there will never be wanting multitudes that will indulge an easy vice. ("Savage", Lives II 374)

...it seldom happens that we can contain ourselves long in a neutral state, or forbear to sink into vice, when we are no longer soaring towards virtue. (Rambler 103, IV 187)

Johnson's manner, as he draws the lines of distinction between right and wrong, acquires, it seems to me, a particularly clear-cut and emphatic quality:

"While they [the Scots] confine their benevolence...exclusively to those of their own country, they expect to share in the good offices of other people. Now (said Johnson)

this principle is either right or wrong; if right, we should do well to imitate such conduct; if wrong, we cannot too much detest it." (Life 439)

But truth, when it is reduced to practice, easily becomes subject to caprice and imagination, and many particular acts will be wrong, though their general principle be right. (Idler 52, II 162) [Modelled as it is on the schema 'General vs. Particular', this item could be assigned as readily to the category 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata' as to this one]

...the truth is that the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong. ("Milton", Lives I 99)

This last citation opens a window, it seems to me, on to that which is truly central both in Johnson's view of

humankind and in his value-system.

Philosophical Distinction-making

In his setpiece character sketch at the end of the Life, Boswell picks out for special mention two hallmark features of Johnson's psychic makeup, his "most logical head" and "most fertile imagination" (1402). If, insofar as distinction-making is concerned, Johnson's 'most fertile imagination' comes most visibly into its own in the realm of 'Distinctions by appeal to Analogy', then his 'most logical head' makes its influence felt more conspicuously and more emphatically in the domain I have labelled 'Philosophical' than it does anywhere else; and if, in this domain, the driving force behind his distinction-making was his 'logical head', its efforts were certainly befriended and seconded by his predilections: at Oxford, "the study of which he was the most fond," Boswell tells us, "was Metaphysicks" (Life 52); and, in general, "he delighted to express familiar thoughts in philosophical language"[38] (ibid. 156). Here is an example of that:

> Of charity it is superfluous to observe, that it

[38] Apposite in this connection is W K Wimsatt's judgment: "It would be inept...to speak of anything like a Ruling Passion. Yet Johnson's bent for philosophic imagery and diction was among the most permanent attachments of his mind..." (1948:69).

> could have no place if there were no want; for of a virtue which could not be practised, the omission could not be culpable. Evil [here the evil of want] is not only the occasional but the efficient cause of charity; we are incited to the relief of misery by the consciousness that we have the same nature with the sufferer, that we are in danger of the same distresses, and may sometime implore the same assistance. (Idler 89, II 277)

The philosophical gusto of this passage is unmistakable: as if it were not enough to employ (in the first three or four lines) a mode of reasoning that is, in its logical schematism, already most strenuously philosophical, there is still the appeal to the 'certifiably' philosophical distinction between occasional (i.e. subsidiary) and efficient (i.e. primary) causes[39]. So what is on display here is distinction-making of a formally, indeed, ceremoniously philosophical character. Baked in the same mould, as it were, are these examples:

> But though where there is vice there must be

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[39] **occasional cause**: "a secondary cause whereby or whereupon the primary or efficient cause comes into operation" (Oxford English Dictionary 2nd edition).

want of reverence, it is not reciprocally true, that where there is want of reverence there is always vice. (Idler 51, II 159) [this is an instance of denial of the contrary]

"Why", said the prince, "did thy father desire the increase of his wealth, when it was already greater than he durst discover or enjoy? I am unwilling to doubt thy veracity, yet inconsistencies cannot both be true."

"Inconsistencies", answered Imlac, "cannot be right, but, imputed to man, they may both be true." (Rasselas, in Bronson 623) [here we have an instance of the subtle philosophical (casuistical?) distinction between what is (logically) right and what is true]

The great majority of Johnson's 'philosophical' distinctions are not, however, of this strenuously and explicitly philosophical stamp. They are, rather, implicitly philosophical, being modelled, in an unassertive but for all that unmistakable fashion, on a variety of schematic formations all of a recognizably philosophical cast. But before getting down to an analysis of these schematically structured distinctions, I have to face up

to a question I raised earlier in the chapter because if I don't I court the imputation of barking up the wrong tree to begin with. The question to be confronted is that of the justification for having two separate groupings labelled 'Conceptual' and 'Philosophical': is not this an artificial division? What after all is the difference between them? Are they not really just one and the same thing under different names? In answer to these questions, I would say, yes, in one sense they are: inasmuch as the items in the two categories making up the genus 'Philosophical' all mediate concepts of one kind or another, they are indeed justifiably regarded as 'conceptual'[40], but - and this is the crucial point - what is really distinctive about them is not so much their conceptual content as their configuration, their formal organization - and this is of an unmistakably philosophical cast. In short, all these items are modelled on recognizably philosophical schemata[41] of one type or another. This was a feature that came into view already in the initial stages of my research, so the pattern early

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[40] The reverse, however, does not necessarily hold true: not everything 'conceptual' is of necessity at the same time 'philosophical'.

[41] By 'philosophical schemata' I mean the formal, almost diagrammatic, structures of reasoning, argument and analysis characteristic of philosophical discourse.

began to emerge of a growing number of items all sharing the attribute of philosophical modelling; that being so, it seemed to me not just desirable but necessary, indeed obligatory, to bring them together and constitute them as an independent category on the basis of the shared attribute. In the event, there seemed to be good reason for establishing not one but two categories structured on philosophical schemata; together they make up one of my more populous aggregations.

Of the two, one is a good deal larger than the other: designated 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata', it contains a large number of items dispersed among a sizable number of schematic formations. The smaller category, titled 'Things in Themselves Distinguished from their Effects' consists, self-evidently, of fewer items, and all of them are modelled on just one schema. I propose to consider the larger category first.

Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata

The schemata comprehended by this category fall naturally into two groups. The organizing formulae of the first group are these:

Positive vs. negative

Active vs. passive (and its sibling, action vs. abstention)

Commission (of an act) vs. omission

Exemption from something vs. positive possession of something

Attraction vs. repulsion

The organizing formulae of the second group are:

Particular vs. General

Kind vs. degree

Extent vs. degree

Gradations/Comparisons of degree

What vs. How

What vs. When

The basis of distinction between these two groups is that all the formations of the first are really just permutations of the positive< >negative antithesis, which may accordingly be viewed as a 'master' schema, a 'genotype' (to borrow a term from biology). By contrast, the formations of the second group owe nothing to the positive< >negative schema nor, indeed, to any master-type at all; they are not permutations; each of them is rather a type unto itself.

Because the 'master' schema of the first group - the

positive< >negative antithesis - is structured on so emphatic an opposition, the distinctions modelled on it, or on its permutations, tend in their turn to take shape as strongly contrasted oppositions - as antitheses, in other words. Some of the most antithetically complexioned of all Johnson's distinctions are those modelled on the positive< >negative opposition. As this is the foundational schema, it seems proper to consider it first.

When one considers how wide-ranging and variegated is Johnson's interrogation of the 'text' of men, manners and morals, it is worthy of remark that he is minded as often as he is to 'read' it in terms of the workings of the positive< >negative contrast. Here is a sampling of that 'reading':

> [W]e know rather what he [Milton] was not, than what he was. He was not of the church of Rome; he was not of the church of England. ("Milton", Lives I 155)
>
> This, and this only, is told by Pope, who is more willing...to shew what his father was not, than what he was. ("Pope", Lives III 83)
>
> [Collins] affected the obsolete when it was not worthy of revival; and he puts his words out of

the common order, seeming to think, with some later candidates for fame, that not to write prose is certainly to write poetry. ("Collins", Lives III 341) [Defining poetry negatively as 'not prose', Collins's error, then, is to mistake negative for positive]

There is a certain piquancy in playing off the censure of Collins against the following exchange:

BOSWELL: Then, Sir, what is poetry? JOHNSON: Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is. (Life 744) [emphasis in original] [This item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy']

Every man ought to endeavour at eminence, not by pulling others down, but by raising himself... (Rambler 9, III 50)

Prudence...rather prevents loss than procures advantages... (Idler 57, II 177-78) [negative gains distinguished from positive]

Likewise:

Rules may obviate faults, but can never confer beauties. (ibid. 178)

...judgement in the operations of intellect can hinder faults, but not produce excellence. ("Prior", Lives II 208)

[T]he Persians always conceived an invincible contempt of a man, who had violated the laws of secrecy; for they thought, that, however he might be deficient in the qualities requisite to actual excellence, the negative virtues at least were in his power, and though he perhaps could not speak well if he was to try, it was still easy for him not to speak. (Rambler 13, III 68)

Of these recluses [the members of monastic orders] it may...be affirmed, that they have secured their innocence, by the loss of their virtue...and that lest they should do what they ought not to do, they leave much undone, which they ought to do. (Sermons XIV 33) [emphasis in original] [This item is also an instance of 'Distinction between Near-Synonyms': innocence/virtue]

The next three examples show Johnson distinguishing positive virtues from negative with reference to a realm - that of social conduct - whose importance to him as an

object of perpetual curiosity and of unremitting critical scrutiny was second only to its importance in his actual life-experience. The modus operandi of the positive< >negative polarity on which the distinctions are modelled involves in each instance playing off the positive social virtue of giving pleasure/delight against the negative one of forbearing to give offence/pain. In the first of the passages, Johnson's "happy discriminative...portrait of the late Mr Fitzherbert of Derbyshire", the positive< >negative antithesis is expressly pointed up; in the other two exemplification supplies the place of explicit mention:

> "There was...no sparkle, no brilliancy in Fitzherbert; but I never knew a man who was so generally acceptable. ...He was an instance of the truth of the observation, that a man will please more upon the whole by negative qualities than by positive; by never offending than by giving a great deal of delight. (Life 835-36)
>
> Gayety seldom fails to give some pain; the hearers either strain their faculties to accompany its towerings, or are left behind in envy and despair. Good humour [by contrast]...pleases principally by not

offending. (Rambler 72, IV 14)

...though it be the privilege of a very small number to ravish and to charm, every man may hope by rules and caution not to give pain, and may, therefore, by the help of good-breeding, enjoy the kindness of mankind, though he should have no claim to higher distinctions. (Rambler 98, IV 161-62)

Now I want to bring forward examples of discriminations modelled on those schematic matrices that are really just permutations of the positive< >negative 'genotype':

We talked of the Roman Catholick religion. JOHNSON: In the barbarous ages, Sir, priests and people were equally deceived; but afterwards there were gross corruptions introduced by the clergy, such as indulgencies to priests to have concubines, and the worship of images, not, indeed, inculcated, but knowingly permitted. (Life 729) [active vs. passive]

[Milton] did not refuse admission to the thoughts or images of his predecessors, but he did not seek them. ("Milton", Lives I 194)

[active vs. passive]

> Yet they [contemporary stage tragedies] may at least claim this commendation, that they avoid gross faults, and that if they cannot often move terror or pity, they are always careful not to provoke laughter. (Rambler 125, IV 305) [action vs. abstention]
>
> ...but a letter is addressed to a single mind, of which the prejudices and partialities are known; and must therefore please, if not by favouring them, by forbearing to oppose them. ("Pope", Lives III 207) [action vs. abstention]
>
> [T]hey [the monastic orders] have too often sunk into inactivity and uselessness; and though they have forborn to injure society, have not fully paid their contributions to its happiness. (Rambler 131, IV 335) [action vs. abstention]

In the next three examples Johnson's moral and social perspectives intersect: the distinctions here turn on intentional lying (an act of commission) being played off against negligence to ascertain the truth (an act of omission):

> He [Johnson] said, "Burnet's History of his own

<u>times</u> is very entertaining. The style, indeed, is mere chit-chat. I do not believe that Burnet intentionally lyed; but he was so much prejudiced, that he took no pains to find out the truth..." (<u>Life</u> 510)

...when I rose to go to church in the afternoon, I was informed there had been an earthquake, of which, it seems, the shock had been felt, in some degree, at Ashbourne. JOHNSON: Sir, it will be much exaggerated in popular talk: for, in the first place, the common people do not accurately adapt their thoughts to the objects; nor, secondly, do they accurately adapt their words to their thoughts: they do not mean to lie; but, taking no pains to be exact, they give you very false accounts. (<u>Life</u> 825) [this item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinction-making by way of Enumeration/Hierarchical Ordering': "in the first place" >> "...secondly"]

...Our lively hostess [Mrs Thrale]...ventured to say [that] little variations in narrative must happen a thousand times a day, if one [were] not

> perpetually watching. JOHNSON: Well, Madam, and you ought to be perpetually watching. It is more from carelessness about truth than from intentional lying, that there is so much falsehood in the world. (Life 899) [emphasis in original]

The schema underpinning the following examples is configured on the contrast between exemption from something unwelcome and undesirable (a negative condition) and the possession, either enjoyed or envisaged, of something welcome and desirable (a positive condition). So, for example, in the first item below, the negative is exemption from reproach (a "negative recompense", as Johnson calls it), and the contrasted positive, the (hoped-for) possession of praise:

> Every other authour may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach, and even this negative recompense has been yet granted to very few. ("Preface" to the Dictionary, in Bronson 234)
>
> That such authors [literary scribblers] are not to be rewarded with praise is evident...but surely though they cannot aspire to honour, they

may be exempted from ignominy, and adopted into that order of men which deserves our kindness though not our reverence. (Rambler 145, V 11)

There are others [among the 'admirers of solitude'] of minds more delicate and tender...Such men are in haste to retire from grossness, falsehood and brutality; and hope to find in private habitations at least a negative felicity, and exemption from the shocks and perturbations with which public scenes are continually distressing them. (Adventurer 126, II 472) [This is a truncated distinction: the normal binary structure of distinction-making remains incomplete here because 'positive felicity' does not actually feature in the statement; it is only implied]

Prudence...often escapes miscarriages, but seldom reaches either power or honour. (Idler 57, II 177-78) The gratification of curiosity rather frees us from uneasiness than confers pleasure. (Rambler 103, IV 186)

Finally (as far as permutations of the positive< >negative 'genotype' are concerned) I want to look at

distinctions modelled on the attraction vs. repulsion antithesis:

> It is to be suspected that his [Milton's] predominant desire was to destroy rather than establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority. ("Milton", Lives I 157)
>
> They who have already enjoyed the crouds and noise of the great city, know that their desire to return is little more than the restlessness of a vacant mind, that they are not so much led by hope as driven by disgust, and wish rather to leave the country than to see the town. (Idler 80, II 250)

So much, then, for examples of Johnson's recourse to the positive< >negative schema as a matrix for distinction-making. I could have brought forward twice as many were I so minded, but obviously there has to be a cap on 'exuberance of exemplification'. Even so, arguing just from the evidence proffered (and also, I should add, from subjective impressions gained in the course of my transit through the Johnsonian oeuvre), I would say there exist grounds enough for hypothesizing that the positive<

>negative paradigm was woven into the very warp and woof of Johnson's psychic constitution[42], importantly shaping

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[42] I would claim, furthermore, that it was the negative pole of the positive< >negative dyad with which Johnson's psyche was instinctively more in tune. The general complexion of the numerous positive< >negative items cited above, together with the particular detail of many of them ("...he was not of the church of Rome; he was not of the church of England"; "There was...no sparkle, no brilliancy in Fitzherbert; but...", etc., etc.), underlines, it seems to me, how sensitive Johnson was to negative states, negative qualities and the 'negative virtues' (as he describes them in one of the exemplary passages quoted above). Reinforcing the impression produced by the examples already brought forward is evidence coming from another quarter, the Dictionary. What specifically is of interest here is the frequency with which Johnson has recourse in the Dictionary to definition by negatives or by contraries.

The predicament that drives lexicographers to fall back on the pis aller of definition by contraries or by negatives is an altogether unavoidable one. Sooner or later every lexicographer comes up against the problem that Johnson, who was only too aware of it, describes as follows: "To explain, requires the use of terms less abstruse than that which is to be explained, and such terms cannot always be found ("Preface" to the Dictionary, in Bronson 245). In this kind of situation (very much of the catch-22 type), where 'terms less abstruse' (than, ordinarily, the commonest and most simple words of a language, and typically its adjectives) simply cannot be found, the only way of breaking out of what would otherwise be a closed circle is by resorting to the lexicographically invidious but unavoidable expedient of definition by contraries or by negatives (e.g. "**open** - not impeding or preventing passage; not shut up; not covered over; not clogged" (Webster)).

This dilemma, as I have said, is one that all lexicographers sooner or later come up against and must somehow cope with, but the particular point of interest in the present context is that in dealing with this difficulty Johnson appears to have been especially prone to enlisting the help of negatives and contraries in his definitions of problematical words. This is the thesis advanced by Isobel Grundy from whose exposition the following citation is drawn:

> [Johnson] often defines by...contraries (as his first meaning for **fat** is 'the contrary to lean'), especially in explanation of those words which are 'too much known, to be happily illustrated'. Being more aware than his predecessors that 'nothing can be defined but by the use of words too plain to admit a definition', he makes more use of contraries than they do...He defines many pairs of words (**light** and **heavy**, **thick** and **thin**, **lean** and **fat**, **long** and **short**) each in terms of its opposite. **Long** is 'not short' and **short**, contrariwise, 'not long'. He uses these contraries even more profusely when defining conditions which indicate a lack of something: **little**, **low**, **small** and **dark** are defined more in terms of contraries than **light/heavy**, and so on...Of Johnson's five definitions of

> **little**, three employ 'not'. His first definition of **small** includes 'not great' and his last 'not strong'...For the adjective **low**, nine of the sixteen definitions begin with 'not'... 'Not' or its equivalent appears in each of Johnson's seven definitions of the adjective **dark**... (1986:13-14)

Assuming the case Grundy constructs is well founded - and I believe it is - then it is clearly one that lends support to my contention that Johnson's mind, in its encounter with the positive< >negative antithesis, manifests an exceptional degree of responsiveness to - indeed, an instinctive affinity for - the negative polarity.

Continuing her argument, Grundy remarks that "**little**, **low**, **small**, **petty** and **dark**...which invite definition by negatives, differ from their opposites...in carrying a sense of privation. Johnson defines **privativeness** as 'Notation of absence of something that should be present'. ...The Dictionary explains the several senses of **pretty** in terms of deprivation, in a manner increasingly derogatory: '1. Neat; elegant; pleasing without surprise or elevation. 2. Beautiful without grandeur or dignity. 3. It is used in a kind of diminutive contempt in poetry, and in conversation...'" (14). Grundy's perception of Johnson's uncommon responsiveness to the privative dimension of words (that is, to the way in which, in words with a privative resonance, meaning is defined less with reference to stated attributes than with reference to the missing or excluded ones they strongly evoke) is more suggestive than she realizes. For there is, as I see it, an unmistakable connection (not remarked by Grundy) between Johnson's highly-developed 'feel' for linguistic 'privativeness' and yet another of those strongly marked traits of his mindset - a profound consciousness of, and sensitivity to, the absences and 'vacuities' in human existence and experience. These "vacuities of life", as he calls them (v. Idler 73, II 228; Adventurer 128, II 476), which are registered symptomatically as a sense of perpetual disappointment, frustration and dissatisfaction, and of radical personal unfulfilment, are the outgrowth of a felt shortfall, gap or void at the centre of being. Perhaps only dimly descried, though painfully experienced as a sensation of radical unfulfilment, this void is in its turn an outgrowth of the fact (as Johnson saw it) that human cravings always outstrip the capacity of anything to gratify them ("It is impossible to supply wants as fast as an idle imagination may be able to form them" Rambler 128, IV 319; cf. Bate (1955) Ch. 2, "The Hunger of Imagination"). This fact he viewed as an existential 'given', an inescapable concomitant of the human condition. Profoundly - and poignantly - conscious as he was of this 'given', he was more profoundly and poignantly conscious still of the psychological bind to which it gives rise: the incessant, restless pursuit of pleasure, novelty, worldly success and riches aimed at filling the void at the centre of existence, and their predestined failure, because of the unbridgeable gulf between desire and gratification, to secure this objective - and then, at the symptomatic level, the registration of that failure as sensations of perpetual frustration, disappointment and unfulfilment. When, in Rambler 32, Johnson speaks of "Infelicity [as] involved in corporeal nature, and

some of his basic thought patterns, which his distinction-making drive enlisted for its own uses as occasion arose[43].

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interwoven with our being" (III 175), he is, as much as anything, gesturing precisely towards this inescapable, incommutable 'sentence' of radical human unfulfilment. The definitive statement, though, of his sense of life's vacuity is put in the mouth of Imlac, his philosopher-spokesman in Rasselas (a paradigm case, if ever there was one, of the motif of the frustrated, disappointed quest). Speaking through Imlac, Johnson offers an incisive analysis of the psychological distortions that both accompany and result from the imperative need to propitiate, through a resort to expedients increasingly extravagant and redundant, the voracious cravings of the void within. The occasion of Imlac's disquisition is a visit with his three companions to the pyramids, the sight of which elicits the following reflection:

> Of the wall [the Great Wall of China] it is very easy to assign the motives. It secured a wealthy and timorous nation from the incursions of Barbarians...
>
> But for the pyramids no reason has ever been given adequate to the cost and labour of the work. The narrowness of the chambers proves that it could afford no retreat from enemies, and treasures might have been reposited at far less expence with equal security. It seems to have been erected only in compliance with that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life, and must be always appeased by some employment. Those who have already all that they can enjoy, must enlarge their desires. He that has built for use, till use is supplied, must begin to build for vanity, and extend his plan to the utmost power of human performance, that he may not be soon reduced to form another wish.
>
> I consider this mighty structure as a monument of the insufficiency of human enjoyments. A king, whose power is unlimited, and whose treasures surmount all real and imaginary wants, is compelled to solace, by the erection of a pyramid, the satiety of dominion and tastelessness of pleasures, and to amuse the tediousness of declining life, by seeing thousands labouring without end, and one stone, for no purpose, laid upon another. Whoever thou art, that, not content with a moderate condition, imaginest happiness in royal magnificence, and dreamest that command or riches can feed the appetite of novelty with perpetual gratifications, survey the pyramids, and confess thy folly! (in Bronson 671-72)

[43] It appears, indeed, that not only Johnson's distinction-making drive but other of his dualizing mental operations as well were modelled on, or, at least, were strongly influenced by, the positive< >negative antithesis. Consider, for example, Walter Jackson Bate's contention that

> Much of Johnson's greater writing on human nature and

Now I want to move on to consider the varieties of philosophical distinction-making modelled on those schemata which have been grouped together on the purely exclusionary basis of not falling within the purview of the positive< >negative master-type. To begin with, here are some examples of distinctions modelled on the contrast between Particular and General; the first is probably the most celebrated of its kind in the entire Johnsonian canon:

> "The business of a poet", said Imlac, "is to examine not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip...and must neglect the minuter discriminations...for those characteristicks which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness". (Rasselas in Bronson 628-29)

> human life falls into a distinctive literary type, eminently characteristic of him, that we might call "satire manqué" or "satire foiled". It involves a kind of double action in which a strong satiric blow is about to strike home unerringly when another arm at once reaches out and deflects or rather lifts it. (1975: 493-94)

To me this reads like nothing so much as a description of the positive< >negative schema manifesting itself through an alternating permutation which one could perhaps characterize as 'propulsion and recoil'. Considering the claim I advance regarding the 'embeddedness' of the positive< >negative antithesis in Johnson's mental make-up, I find it significant that Bate, referring to his bent for 'satire manqué', represents it "as a habit of thought...so deeply ingrained...that we see it throughout the whole course of his adult life" (ibid. 494). [my emphasis]

The resemblance of poetick numbers to the subject which they mention or describe, may be considered as general or particular; as consisting in the flow and structure of a whole passage taken together, or as comprised in the sound of some emphatical and descriptive words, or in the cadence and harmony of single verses. (Rambler 94, IV 135)

[Dryden's] criticism may be considered as general or occasional. In his general precepts...he may doubtless be safely recommended to the confidence of the reader; but his occasional and particular positions were sometimes interested, sometimes negligent, and sometimes capricious. ("Dryden", Lives I 413)

Whoever commits a fraud is guilty not only of the particular injury to him whom he deceives, but of the diminution of that confidence which constitutes not only the ease but the existence of society. (Rambler 79, IV 55) [In this instance the dimension of generality - the general ease and existence of society - is

implied rather than stated]

The philosophical schema on which the following items are modelled is that of Kind vs. Degree:

> Every man is prompted by the love of himself to imagine, that he possesses some qualities, superior, either in kind or in degree, to those which he sees allotted to the rest of the world. (Rambler 21, III 115)
>
> ...I think the strictest moralists allow forms of address to be used without much regard to their literal acceptation, when either respect or tenderness requires them, because they are universally known to denote not the degree but the species of our sentiments. (Idler 50, II 158)

Next we have distinctions modelled on the contrast - a quite subtle one - between degree and extent (or scope):

> Mankind are universally corrupt, but corrupt in different degrees; as they are universally ignorant, yet with greater or less irradiations of knowledge. (Adventurer 137, II 489)
>
> Infelicity is involved in corporeal nature, and interwoven with our being; all attempts

> therefore to decline it wholly are useless and vain: the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side, the choice is only between those which are more or less sharp, or tinged with poison of greater or less malignity... (Rambler 32, III 175-76)
>
> I believe every reader will agree that in all those passages [from Paradise Lost], though not equally in all, the music is injured... (Rambler 88, IV 103)
>
> To love all men is our duty...but to love all equally is impossible... (Rambler 99, IV 166)

Here are some distinctions modelled on gradations and/or comparisons of degree:

> Lord Lyttelton's poems...have nothing to be despised, and little to be admired. ("Lyttelton", Lives III 456)
>
> It is dangerous for mortal beauty...to be examined by too strong a light. The torch of truth shows much that we cannot, and all that we would not see. (Rambler 10, III 53)
>
> But it must be at least confessed that to embellish the form of nature is an innocent

amusement, and some praise must be allowed by the most supercilious observer to him [here Shenstone, who had taken to being an 'improver'] who does best what such multitudes are contending to do well. ("Shenstone", Lives III 351)

It is sufficient for Watts [in his devotional verse] to have done better than others what no man has done well. ("Watts", Lives III 310)

JOHNSON [speaking of the actresses Mrs Porter and Mrs Clive]: Mrs. Porter in the vehemence of rage, and Mrs. Clive in the sprightliness of humour, I have never seen equalled. What Clive did best, she did better than Garrick; but could not do half so many things well. (Life 1252)

[This is a three-way distinction: well< >better< >best; it also throws into relief the contrast between extent and degree: '...could not do half so many things well']

"Dryden has written prologues superiour to any that David Garrick has written; but David Garrick has written more good prologues than Dryden has done." (Life 598-99)

One of the more frequently enlisted of the philosophical schemata is the formation What vs. How (i.e. a fact, act, event or condition as such distinguished from the manner of its occurrence, performance or expression). Here is a quintet of distinctions modelled on this formation:

> ...the dart of death indeed falls from heaven, but we poison it by our own misconduct; to die is the fate of man, but to die with lingering anguish is generally his folly. (Rambler 85, IV 83)

> We talked of Pope. JOHNSON: He wrote his Dunciad for fame. That was his primary motive. ...He delighted to vex them [the dunces], no doubt; but he had more delight in seeing how well he could vex them. (Life 606)

> "...though I hold the Irish to be rebels, I dont think they have been so very wrong, but you know that you compelled our Parliament...to pass an act in your favour. That, I call rebellion." "But Doctor," said I [the Reverend Thomas Campbell], "did the Irish claim anything that ought not to have been granted...?" "Sir, I

wont dispute that matter with you, but what I insist upon is that the mode of requisition was rebellious." (in Hill II 56)

I related a dispute between Goldsmith and Mr. Robert Dodsley...Goldsmith asserted, that there was no poetry produced in this age. Dodsley...maintained that though you could not find a palace like Dryden's Ode on St. Cecilia's Day, you had villages composed of very pretty houses...JOHNSON: I think Dodsley gave up the question. He and Goldsmith said the same thing; only he said it in a softer manner than Goldsmith did; for he acknowledged that there was no poetry, nothing that towered above the common mark. (Life 743)

JOHNSON: Sir, he [the poet Thomas Gray] was dull in company, dull in his closet, dull every where. He was dull in a new way, and that made many people think him GREAT. (Life 600) [emphasis in original]

Finally, to round off this section, here is a distinction modelled on the schema What vs. When (an act distinguished from its timing):

> I will not say that what they [the recently dissolved Ministry] did was always wrong; but it was always done at a wrong time. (Life 1174)

I propose now to examine the smaller of the categories in the grouping labelled 'Philosophical'; to this category I have assigned the descriptive title 'Things in Themselves Distinguished from their Effects'.

Things in Themselves Distinguished from their Effects

I could in principle have considered this category under the same head as the formations I have just been examining - that is, formations not of the positive< >negative type; as it is technically not of this type either, it could readily enough have been bracketed with the other schemata unified on the exclusionary basis of not falling within the scope of the positive< >negative 'genotype'. Given, however, that the schema 'Things in Themselves as Distinct from their Effects' is so basic, so ancient and so prominent in philosophical discourse - it has its roots after all in Aristotle's distinction between 'substance' and 'accident', and is itself a 'genotype' for all distinctions between 'inalienable' and 'alienable' properties - I felt its special importance required to be

recognized and signalled. As this purpose manifestly would not have been served by simply lumping it together with the other six schemata not of the positive< >negative type (for that would have been to suggest that in point of importance there was nothing to choose between it and them), there seemed to be solid grounds for constituting it as a separate category in its own right. Here is a sampling of the items it contains:

> "The liberty of using harmless pleasures", proceeded Imlac, "will not be disputed; but it is still to be examined what pleasures are harmless. The evil of any pleasure that Nekayah can image is not in the act itself, but in its consequences. Pleasure, in itself harmless, may become mischievous, by endearing us to a state which we know to be transient and probatory..."
>
> (Rasselas, in Bronson 704)
>
> Many enjoyments, innocent in themselves, may become dangerous by too much frequency; publick spectacles, convivial entertainments, domestick games, sports of the field, or gay or ludicrous conversation, all of them harmless, and some of them useful, while they are regulated by

religious prudence, may yet become pernicious, when they pass their bounds, and usurp too much of that time which is given us... (Sermons XIV 37)

I mentioned a club in London...the members of which all assume Shakespeare's characters. ...JOHNSON: Don't be of it, sir. Now that you have a name, you must be careful to avoid many things, not bad in themselves, but which will lessen your character. (Hebrides Journal 307)

...some solemn music being played on French horns, he [Johnson] said, "This is the first time that I have ever been affected by musical sounds;" adding, "that the impression made upon him was of a melancholy kind." Mr. Langton saying, that this effect was a fine one - JOHNSON: Yes, if it softens the mind, so as to prepare it for the reception of salutary feelings, it may be good: but inasmuch as it is melancholy per se, it is bad." (Life 1080-81)

...upon practice, not upon opinion, depends the happiness of mankind; and controversies, merely speculative, are of small importance in

> themselves, however they may have sometimes heated a disputant, or provoked a faction. (Rambler 81, IV 61)
>
> The great hardships of poverty were to Savage not the want of lodging or of food, but the neglect and contempt which it drew upon him. ("Savage", Lives II 402-03)
>
> All the interpretations of words [in the Dictionary] are not written with same skill, or the same happiness: things equally easy in themselves, are not all equally easy to any single mind. ("Preface" to the Dictionary, in Bronson 247)

I have sought to show, under the 'thematic' head of 'Philosophical Distinction-making', how Dr Johnson's 'drive to distinguish' expresses itself through a constellation of discriminative formations, all of them of a recognizably philosophical cast. Moving on, I now aim to show how this same drive manifests itself in the domain of 'Conceptual Distinction-making'.

Conceptual Distinction-making

This grouping consists of two categories, the larger

one by far bearing by far the shorter designation - 'Distinctions of Ideas' - while the smaller is encumbered with the title 'A Specific Instance Expressly Distinguished from a more or less Undifferentiated Backdrop'. In terms of the number of individual items they contain, these two categories together make up one of the more populous of my groupings. I propose to deal first with the larger of the two.

Distinctions of Ideas

If we think of ideas as being surrounded by 'fields' of signification and implication, then these 'fields', in their disposition relative to one another, may lie far apart, or close by, or may even overlap. When they lie far apart from one another that means that the ideas at their centre belong to realms so different that there appears to be no occasion for distinguishing between them - nor any point in doing so. To exemplify: ideas about politics and navigation belong to realms so self-evidently unrelated, so 'other', that there exists no basis on which they 'ask' to be distinguished from one another; and if it occurs to anybody to do so, that would simply be using distinction-making to state the obvious and to pay court to the

pointless. When the 'fields of signification' lie close to one another, the implication is that the points of difference between the concepts they encompass will need to be actually pointed up in order to be clearly descried. So this is a case where distinction-making is clearly called for; there is both occasion and reason for it; the context is one in which it is apposite to speak of an 'invitation' being extended to distinction-making. When the 'fields of signification' actually overlap, rendering the differences between the concepts (or words) at their centre obscure, if not imperceptible, to ordinary understanding, then (to press into service the argument a fortiori) the invitation to - and the need for - distinction-making to bring those shadowy differences into view is more clear-cut still. Of the three scenarios outlined here, the one that applies to 'Distinctions of Ideas', the category under discussion, is the middle case, in which the 'fields of signification' lie close, possibly adjacent, to one another; the third-mentioned scenario, which posits a situation of actual 'field-overlap', applies to the category I have styled 'Shades of Verbal Meaning: Distinctions between Near-Synonyms', a category I shall be examining in the next section under the head of 'Verbal

Distinction-making'. But it is as well to point out at this juncture that the essential principle of differentiation not only between the category under discussion and the one labelled 'Distinctions between Near-Synonyms', but also between the groupings designated 'Conceptual' and 'Verbal', is precisely this question of how and where the 'fields of signification and implication' are disposed relative to one another. Since in the latter case they actually overlap, distinction-making necessarily becomes in that situation a business of "separating similitudes" ("Preface" to the Dictionary, in Bronson 253). In the former case, by contrast, where the 'fields' do no more than lie close to one another, distinction-making turns out to be much more a matter of pointing up differences between concepts belonging to related, possibly adjacent, domains - concepts manifesting liaison rather than similitude. If the argument I am making here seems overly abstract, I must hope that the examples I shall be bringing forward will serve to clarify the picture.

The first of them is an exceedingly long one, but amplitude of citation is, I believe, justified in this instance not only because the passage in question so fully and vividly sets the scene for the numerous examples that

come after but also - and equally importantly - because it communicates with such liveliness and fidelity the authentic 'feel' of the distinction-making 'milieu' that Johnson and his circle at one and the same time engendered and inhabited. When they got together, they summoned into existence, quite naturally, quite spontaneously, it would seem, a kind of academy of distinction-making; actually, it was more like a hothouse, though when Johnson came to the fore, which he seldom failed to do, it began turning into a theatre of distinction-making. As the Drury-lane playhouse provided a stage for Garrick's exceptional talents, so a gathering of Johnson and his friends provided a stage for his. This was the world he 'bestrid' with effortless pre-eminence[44]; this was the arena in which he "exult[ed]...in his powers"[45] (Life 1402), and particularly (from the standpoint of the present inquiry) his powers as a maker of distinctions. In discharging this role he could usually be relied on to turn in a bravura performance: the air of 'performance', indeed, clings heavily (perhaps

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[44] Cf. Sir John Hawkins: "...as Alexander and Caesar were born for conquest, so was Johnson for the office of a symposiarch, to preside in all conversations; and I never yet saw the man who would venture to contest his right" (110).

[45] Clingham offers, to my mind, an accurate insight into the importance conversation had for Johnson when he writes that "conversation was to Johnson a mode of being and action that entailed a moral engagement with others, with the world, with self and even with God" (46).

headily) to his distinction-making style - and so what catches the eye is not only the address with which he seizes upon just the ideas and topics that lend themselves with particular readiness to distinction-making, nor only the precision, skill and flair with which he generates important and illuminating distinctions as he trains upon the issues under consideration the laser-like beam of his probing and disentangling intellect, but also the gusto with which he does all this; and not seldom one gets the feeling that there's quite a bit of glee mixed in with the gusto (it is at these points of course that the sense of Johnson's 'exulting in his powers' comes through most strongly). In the extended passage from the Life which follows, all these features are on display; it seems to me indeed that in the scene here recorded Johnson could be described as getting almost drunk on distinction-making. The topic under discussion - that of toleration - is after all an important as well as complex one, thus inviting the framing of important distinctions, and this circumstance perhaps roused his distinction-making drive to a particularly intense pitch of activity; but even where the topic is slight and nothing important is at stake, there too his drive to distinguish is ever at the ready, needing

no second invitation to click into action[46]. So much then for my 'prologue'; now comes the 'swelling act' of my citation:

> I introduced the subject of toleration. JOHNSON: Every society has the right to preserve publick peace and order, and therefore has a good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have a dangerous tendency. To say the magistrate has this right, is using an inadequate word: it is the society for which the magistrate is agent. He may be morally or theologically wrong in restraining the propagation of opinions which he thinks dangerous, but he is politically right. MAYO: I am of opinion, Sir, that every man is entitled to liberty of conscience in religion; and that the magistrate cannot restrain that right.

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[46] Here is an example:

> Talking of shaving the other night at Dr. Taylor's, Dr. Johnson said, "Sir, of a thousand shavers, two do not shave so much alike as not to be distinguished." I thought this not possible, till he specified so many of the varieties in shaving - holding the razor more or less perpendicular; drawing long or short strokes; beginning at the upper part of the face, or the under; at the right side or the left side. Indeed, when one considers what variety of sounds can be uttered by the windpipe, in the compass of a very small aperture, we may be convinced how many degrees of difference there may be in the application of a razor. (Life 846)

JOHNSON: Sir, I agree with you. Every man has a right to liberty of conscience, and with that the magistrate cannot interfere. People confound liberty of thinking with liberty of talking; nay, with liberty of preaching. Every man has a physical right to think as he pleases; for it cannot be discovered how he thinks. He has not a moral right; for he ought to inform himself, and think justly. But, Sir, no member of a society has a right to teach any doctrine contrary to what that society holds to be true. The magistrate, I say, may be wrong in what he thinks: but, while he thinks himself right, he may and ought to enforce what he thinks. MAYO: Then, Sir, we are to remain always in errour, and truth never can prevail; and the magistrate was right in persecuting the first Christians. JOHNSON: Sir, the only method by which religious truth can be established is by martyrdom. The magistrate has a right to enforce what he thinks; and he who is conscious of the truth has a right to suffer. I am afraid there is no other way of ascertaining the truth, but by

persecution on the one hand and enduring it on the other. GOLDSMITH: But how is a man to act, Sir? Though firmly convinced of the truth of his doctrine, may he not think it wrong to expose himself to persecution? Has he a right to do so? Is it not, as it were, committing voluntary suicide? ...JOHNSON: ...Sir, if a man is in doubt whether it would be better to expose himself to martyrdom or not, he should not do it. He must be convinced that he has a delegation from heaven. GOLDSMITH: I would consider whether there is a greater chance of good or evil upon the whole. If I see a man who had fallen into a well, I would wish to help him out; but if there is a greater probability that he shall pull me in, than that I shall pull him out, I would not attempt it. ...JOHNSON: Sir, you must consider that we have perfect and imperfect obligations. Perfect obligations, which are generally not to do something, are clear and positive; as, "thou shalt not kill". But charity, for instance, is not definable by limits. It is a duty to give to the poor; but

no man can say how much another should give to the poor, or when a man has given too little to save his soul. In the same manner, it is a duty to instruct the ignorant, and of consequence to convert infidels to Christianity; but no man in the common course of things is obliged to carry this to such a degree as to incur the danger of martyrdom...I have said that a man must be persuaded that he has a particular delegation from heaven. GOLDSMITH: How is this to be known? Our first reformers, who were burnt for not believing bread and wine to be CHRIST - JOHNSON (interrupting him): Sir, they were not burnt for not believing bread and wine to be CHRIST, but for insulting those who did believe it. And, Sir, when the first reformers began, they did not intend to be martyred: as many of them ran away as could. ...MAYO: But, Sir, is it not very hard that I should not be allowed to teach my children what I really believe to be the truth? JOHNSON: Why, Sir, you might contrive to teach your children <u>extra scandalum</u>; but, Sir, the magistrate, if he knows it, has a right to

restrain you. Suppose you teach your children to be thieves? MAYO: This is making a joke of the subject. JOHNSON: Nay, Sir, take it thus: - that you teach them the community of goods; for which there are as many plausible arguments as for most erroneous doctrines. You teach them that all things at first were in common, and that no man had a right to any thing but as he laid his hands upon it; and that this still is, or ought to be, the rule amongst mankind. Here, Sir, you sap a great principle in society - property. And don't you think the magistrate would have a right to prevent you? ...MAYO: I think the magistrate has no right to interfere till there is some overt act. BOSWELL: So, Sir, though he sees an enemy to the state charging a blunderbuss, he is not to interfere till it is fired off? MAYO: He must be sure of its direction against the state. JOHNSON: The magistrate is to judge of that. - He has no right to restrain your thinking, because the evil centers in yourself. If a man were sitting at this table, and chopping off his fingers, the

magistrate, as guardian of the community, has no authority to restrain him, however he might do it from kindness as a parent. ...If I think it right to steal Mr Dilly's plate, I am a bad man; but he can say nothing to me. If I make an open declaration that I think so, he will keep me out of his house. If I put forth my hand, I shall be sent to Newgate. This is the gradation of thinking, preaching and acting: if a man thinks erroneously, he may keep his thoughts to himself, and nobody will trouble him; if he preaches erroneous doctrine, society may expel him; if he acts in consequence of it, the law takes place, and he is hanged. MAYO: But, Sir, ought not Christians to have liberty of conscience? JOHNSON: I have already told you so, Sir. You are coming back to where you were. ...Sir, it is no matter, politically, whether the magistrate be right or wrong. ...Old Baxter, I remember, maintains, that the magistrate should "tolerate all things that are tolerable." This is no good definition of toleration upon any principle; but it shews that he thought some

things were not tolerable. TOPLADY: Sir, you have untwisted this difficult subject with great dexterity. ...

A gentleman present ventured to ask Dr. Johnson if there was not a material difference as to toleration of opinions which lead to action, and opinions merely speculative; for instance, would it be wrong in the magistrate to tolerate those who preach against the doctrine of the TRINITY? ...JOHNSON: Why...Sir, I think that permitting men to preach any opinion contrary to the doctrine of the established church tends, in a certain degree, to lessen the authority of the church, and, consequently, to lessen the influence of religion. "It may be considered (said the gentleman) whether it would not be politick to tolerate in such a case." JOHNSON: Sir, we have been talking of right: this is another question. I think it is not politick to tolerate in such a case. (Life 538-42, 543) [emphases in original]

While this episode from the Life undoubtedly succeeds in capturing the flavour and 'feel' of a Johnsonian

'symposium' (using the word in its original Greek sense of a banquet characterized by the free interchange of ideas), it as importantly prepares the way for the analysis which follows by bringing into view well-defined examples of each of the configurations into which the category 'Distinctions of Ideas' naturally divides itself. It is to a discussion of these two configurations or paradigms that I now turn.

The items in the category 'Distinctions of Ideas', like those in the category 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata', fall naturally into two groups, the principle of differentiation between them being this: the one group consists of items in which two (or more) separate ideas/topics are distinguished from one another; the other consists of items in which two (or more) different aspects or attributes of one and the same idea or topic are distinguished from one another. As I have indicated, both these configurations are exemplified in the long passage above: at the end of the citation Johnson distinguishes what is right from what is 'politick': this is an example (one of many in the passage) of separate, though not unrelated, ideas being differentiated from each other. At an earlier point in the extract he calls on Goldsmith to "consider that we have perfect and imperfect

obligations." Here there is but one foundational idea in play, that of 'obligations', but this idea undergoes internal differentiation (bifurcation, in fact) as a pair of contrasting attributes - perfect/imperfect - is brought to bear on it. As it happens, these attributes are sharply contrasted (they fall not far short of being antithetical); consequently, the differentiation of the root idea necessarily takes shape as a sharply contrasted opposition; but this is an exceptional occurrence: in none of the examples cited below will we find quite such antithetically complexioned internal differentiation as we do here. In any case, the degree of contrast informing the internal differentiation is in no way relevant to the organizing principle on which this sub-group is configured, a principle which requires only (though uniformly) that the distinctions drawn bring to light, and play off against one another, different (how much or how little different is of no consequence) aspects, 'angles' or 'shadings' of a single idea or topic. I propose, then, to begin my examination of 'Distinctions of Ideas' by turning the spotlight on to this sub-group in which a single concept or topic undergoes internal differentiation.

As the operative paradigm here is one in which a

single entity (the idea or topic) is subject to internal differentiation, its schematic enactment always takes the form of two (or more) entities (the aspects, 'angles', or 'shadings') being brought to bear on the one at the centre. Manifested at the level of grammatical patterning, this scheme presents a variety of configurations: the most common by far is that in which two (or more) verbs bear upon a single substantive; the rarer configurations present a substantive qualified by two adjectives and a verb modified by two adverbs. This feature of differential grammatical patterning offers me a serviceable principle of arrangement for the presentation of my examples which are, accordingly, mustered under three heads; the items collected under the first of these all involve two (or more) verbs bearing on a single substantive:

> The dictates of Zeno, who commands us to look with indifference on external things, may dispose us to conceal our sorrow, but cannot assuage it. (Idler 41, II 131) [the root concept 'sorrow' is internally differentiated into 'sorrow concealed' vs. 'sorrow assuaged'; the other examples are all configured on the same principle]

...the difference between approving laws, and obeying them, is frequently forgotten... (Rambler 76, IV 34)

...the flying vapours of incipient madness, which from time to time cloud reason without eclipsing it... ("Addison", Lives II 97)

A few years afterwards...by the death of his father, he [Lyttelton] inherited a baronet's title with a large estate, which, though perhaps he did not augment, he was careful to adorn... ("Lyttelton", Lives III 450)

The utmost that we can threaten to one another is that death, which, indeed, we may precipitate, but cannot retard... (Rambler 17, III 95-96)

Many indeed...are not at fifty what they were at thirty, but they commonly...followed the train of external causes, and rather suffered reformation than made it. (Idler 27, II 85)

It is, surely, less foolish and less criminal to permit inaction than compel it... (Idler 38, II 120) [This item is simultaneously an example of 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical

Schemata' (active vs. passive)]

He [Pope] laboured his works first to gain reputation, and afterwards to keep it. ("Pope", Lives III 218)

...the pleasure of expecting enjoyment, is often greater than that of obtaining it... (Rambler 71, IV 9)

This passion for the honour of a profession, like that for the grandeur of our own country, is to be regulated not extinguished. (Rambler 9, III 50)

[Savage] sometimes forgot that he gave others pain to avoid it himself. ("Savage", Lives II 430-31)

...Besides, many particular motives influence a writer, known only to himself...and it may be justly concluded, that, not all letters which are postponed are rejected, nor all that are rejected, critically condemned. (Rambler 10, III 51) [In this instance we find three verbs converging on a single substantive which in consequence is discriminated internally on a three-fold basis: letters postponed vs. letters

rejected vs. letters condemned]

I move on now to consider the items mustered under my second head. The grammatical configuration at work here is one in which a single substantive containing the root idea undergoes conceptual differentiation as it registers the modifying impress, so to speak, of two adjectives of differing import. Here are a few examples:

> The benevolence of Thomson was fervid but not active. ("Thomson", Lives III 297)
>
> ...prudence keeps life safe, but does not often make it happy. (Idler 57, II 178)
>
> ...the man of affectation may, perhaps, be reclaimed, by finding...how much more securely he might make his way to esteem, by cultivating real, than displaying counterfeit qualities. (Rambler 20, III 113-14)
>
> He [Prior] has many vigorous but few happy lines; he has every thing by purchase, and nothing by gift... ("Prior", Lives II 209) [This item is deserving of special comment; it is nothing if not a teeming womb of distinction-making: in the compass of no more than two lines four quite distinct differentiations are

spawned: many/few; vigorous/happy; everything/nothing; purchase/gift]

The configuration under consideration, somewhat embroidered, yields the permutation of two adjectives + two adverbs qualifying a single substantive, as in this item:

> His [Addison's] poetry is polished and pure: the product of a mind too judicious to commit faults, but not sufficiently vigorous to attain excellence. ("Addison", Lives II 145)

The third type of grammatical formation is that in which the modifying action of two adverbs differentially complexions a single verb:

> He [Addison] thinks justly; but he thinks faintly. ("Addison", Lives II 127)

A feature not less curious than striking about this paradigm of a single idea undergoing internal differentiation is that it appears to be confined to Johnson's written discourse. At any rate I was unable to harvest any examples from his conversation, though some, I have no doubt, there must be, which had I been more alert I should have detected. But even allowing for lapses on my part, it still appears that this paradigm is essentially a writerly one in Johnson's practice. The locutions

characteristic of it are notable for their concision and formal balance - "cloud reason without eclipsing it"; "rather suffered reformation than made it" etc. - and these qualities perhaps led him to feel that it was a formation better suited to the written than to the conversational mode. But against this conjecture we have to set the testimony of Johnson's numerous auditors and interlocutors, and that testimony is uniformly to the effect that whenever he wanted to he was effortlessly able to 'change gears' and impart to his spoken discourse the same formal balance, stateliness, correctness, structural cohesiveness, syntactical complexity and rhetorical resonance that distinguish his written[47]. So in the end I am left

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[47] Here is a sampling of this testimony:

* Fanny Burney: "[Johnson] had a facility so complete, that to speak or write produced immediately the same clear and sagacious effect. His pen was as luminous as his tongue, and his tongue was as correct as his pen" (in Rogers 74).
* Sir Brooke Boothby: "Johnson spoke as he wrote. He would take up a topic, and utter upon it a number of the Rambler" (in Hill II 391).
* Ozias Humphrey: "Everything he [Johnson] says is as correct as a second edition" (in Hill II 401).
* Sir John Hawkins: "As he [Johnson] professed always to speak in the best and most correct phrase, rejecting all...common and vulgar combinations of speech...his conversation style bore a great resemblance to that of his writings, so that, in his common discourse, he might seem to incur the censure...of being too eloquent" (163).
* Boswell: "He [Johnson] seemed to take a pleasure in speaking in his own style; for when hehad carelessly missed it, he would repeat the thought translated into it. Talking of the Comedy of The Rehearsal, he said, 'It has not wit enough to keep it sweet.' This was easy; he therefore caught himself, and pronounced a more rounded

documenting a fact that I cannot explain; I cannot account for the apparently exclusive appropriation to Johnson's written discourse of the paradigm of 'internal differentiation'.

By contrast, the other paradigm of this category, that in which two (or more) separate ideas are distinguished

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sentence: 'It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction'" (Life 1312).

In an essay entitled "Observations on Conversational Style" (in Middendorf 273-87), Louis T Milic argues that 'conversational style', properly so described, presents a profile so dislocated and unstructured (when recorded, say, as a verbatim transcript) as to suggest that an unbridgeable gulf exists between the spoken and the written word, such that, in principle, it should be beyond anybody's capacity to speak, under impromptu conditions, as he writes (since, in Milic's view, the difference between impromptu talk and writing is a difference rather of kind than of degree, it is not simply a matter of not being able to speak 'as well as' one writes). Milic then goes on to give, in verbatim transcript, a slice of impromptu talk by an educated speaker; and there is no gainsaying its dislocated and unstructured character. After this citation he continues as follows:

> Though it may be believed that conversation has degenerated in our time...and that this is the reason why educated people seem, when we read their transcribed remarks, to sound like mental defectives, it would be a serious misconception to suppose that Johnson did not sound somewhat like that [i.e. like the speaker in the verbatim transcript] when he talked. (in Middendorf 280)

It is here that I wish to take issue with Milic (although I also have serious doubts about how well advised he is to postulate so radical a cleavage between written and spoken discourse). All the available evidence suggests that Milic's judgment needs to be set on its head, and that it would come a good deal nearer the truth of the the matter were it to read "...it would be a serious misconception to suppose that Johnson did sound somewhat like that when he talked." Realizing perhaps that he has put his head on the block, Milic backpedals a little in his next remark; he concedes: "And if Johnson was the exception, he must have been the solitary one in the history of the language" (idem). Well, I don't know about Johnson's being the 'solitary [exception] in the history of the language', but that he was an exception to the thesis advanced by Milic is certainly beyond doubt. If Milic had formulated his thesis in terms less extreme, it would have been possible so far to agree with him as to grant that Johnson was the exception who proved the rule; but I am afraid that to the 'rule', as enunciated by Milic, there are many exceptions.

from each other, occurs with more or less equal frequency in both segments of the Johnsonian record, the spoken and the written alike. As this paradigm is so amply exemplified, it became important, in the management of my examples, to avoid presenting them as a shapeless, undifferentiated mass. Casting about, then, for a principle of arrangement that would be both coherent and 'readable', I eventually decided on a three-fold division. The first grouping consists of distinctions (alternatively, of ideas and topics available as 'grist' for distinction-making) which were familiar enough in Johnson's day to be regarded as belonging to the 'public domain', as being, in some sort, 'public intellectual property'. In other words, the 'Distinctions of Ideas' in this group are structured on concepts often brought conjointly into play for the sole purpose, really, of being distinguished from one another. The second grouping is made up of distinctions which, in my judgment, were not quite so familiar, not quite so obviously 'public intellectual property' in Johnson's day. These distinctions I have sought to rank in a way that shows up what seems to me to be a gradual modulation in their character: while the earlier items still bear a recognizably 'public' stamp, the later ones, it seems to

me, bear the more individualized cachet of Johnson's own sensibility and 'perspective on things'. To the third grouping I have given the name 'Special Formations', a designation that will be clarified when the grouping itself comes to be dealt with.

To begin, then, with the first grouping - 'Distinctions of Ideas' which may be regarded as belonging in the 'public domain'. The first item brings forward an especially familiar distinction, at any rate in the eighteenth century - that between physical and moral truth. Johnson chooses to impart to his formulation of it a signally formal, even ceremonious, character. The remainder of the examples, which embody distinctions as, or almost as, well-known as this first one, he handles in nowhere near so formal a manner.

> [Johnson] thus defined the difference between physical and moral truth: "Physical truth, is, when you tell a thing as it actually is. Moral truth, is, when you tell a thing sincerely and precisely as it appears to you. I say such a one walked across the street; if he really did so, I told a physical truth. If I thought so, though I should have been mistaken, I told a

moral truth." (Life 1069) [this item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy']

Urging one day the well known hypothesis of Happiness being placed in hope rather than possession; "This", said the Doctor, "is more subtle than true: we talk of the pleasures of hope, we feel those of possession; and no man in his senses would change the last for the first..." (Mrs Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson 64-65)

Nature makes us poor only when we want necessaries, but custom gives the name of poverty to the want of superfluities. (Idler 37, II 116) [Here we have a double distinction: nature< >custom; necessaries< >superfluities]

BOSWELL: I believe natural affection, of which we hear so much, is very small. JOHNSON: Sir, natural affection is nothing: but affection from principle and established duty is sometimes wonderfully strong. (Life 1227)

...a discussion took place, whether the present Earl of Buchan, when Lord Cardross, did right to

refuse to go Secretary of the Embassy to Spain, when Sir James Gray, a man of inferiour rank, went Ambassadour. Dr. Johnson said, that perhaps in point of interest he did wrong; but in point of dignity he did well. ..."Sir, had he gone Secretary while his inferiour was Ambassadour, he would have been a traitor to his rank and family." (Life 481-82)

[Johnson] thus discoursed upon supposed obligations in settling estates: "Where a man gets the unlimited property of an estate, there is no obligation upon him in justice to leave it to one person rather than to another. There is a motive of preference from kindness, and this kindness is generally entertained for the nearest relation." (Life 684) [emphasis in original]

I here suggested something favourable of the Roman Catholicks. TOPLADY: Does not their invocation of saints suppose omnipresence in the saints? JOHNSON: No, Sir, it supposes only pluri-presence... (Life 544)

Foote and Garrick were next compar'd as Mimicks,

they [are]...says Johnson...as distinct in their powers of Mimickry, as Swift and Addison in their powers of humour. Swift could draw a prominent Character, & Foote can imitate to equal perfection the Tricks & Contorsions of some particular Man: Foote for Example can personate Langford, he can not exhibit the general Idea of an Auctioneer. (Mrs Thrale, in Ingrams 83)

BOSWELL: Is not the expression in the Burial-service, "in the sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection" too strong to be used indiscriminately, and, indeed, sometimes when those over whose bodies it is said, have been notoriously profane? JOHNSON: It is sure and certain hope, Sir; not belief. (Life 1229) [emphasis in original]

We talked tonight of Luther's allowing the Landgrave of Hesse two wives, and that it was with the consent of the wife to whom he was first married. JOHNSON: There was no harm in this, so far as she was only concerned, because volenti non fit injuria ['If you wish the injury

you are not injured']. But it was an offence against the general order of society, and against the law of the Gospel, by which one man and one woman are to be united. (Hebrides Journal 288)

I mentioned to him a dispute between a friend of mine and his lady, concerning conjugal infidelity, which my friend had maintained was by no means so bad in the husband, as in the wife. JOHNSON: Your friend was in the right, Sir. Between a man and his Maker it is a different question: but between a man and his wife, a husband's infidelity is nothing...Wise married women don't trouble themselves about infidelity in their husbands. BOSWELL: To be sure there is a great difference between the offence of infidelity in a man and that of his wife. JOHNSON: The difference is boundless. The man imposes no bastards upon his wife. (Life 1035) [Quite so - he imposes bastards upon somebody else's wife]

A gentleman was mentioning...that he never knew but one person that was completely wicked.

JOHNSON: Sir, I don't know what you mean by a person completely wicked. GENTLEMAN: Why, any one that has entirely got rid of all shame. JOHNSON: How is he, then, completely wicked? He must get rid, too, of all conscience. GENTLEMAN: I think conscience and shame the same thing. JOHNSON: I am surprised to hear you say so; they spring from two different sources, and are distinct perceptions: one respects this world, the other the next. (in Hill II 288)

...Johnson could suppress his indignation no longer. "Sir", said he, "you...have the brutality to insult me with what is not my fault, but my misfortune." (The Reverend William Shaw, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Late Dr. Samuel Johnson, in Sherbo 55)

JOHNSON: "...It requires no extraordinary talents to lie and deceive." This led us to consider whether it did not require great abilities to be very wicked. JOHNSON: It requires great abilities to have the power of being very wicked; but not to be very wicked. ...Consider only what act of wickedness requires

great abilities to commit it, when once the person who is to do it has the power; for <u>there</u> is the distinction. It requires great abilities to conquer an army, but none to massacre it after it is conquered. (Hebrides <u>Journal</u> 288) [emphasis in original] [this item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy']

...Johnson ran eagerly to one side of [Mr Cambridge's library], intent on poring over the backs of the books. ...Mr. Cambridge, upon this, politely said, "Dr. Johnson...it seems odd that one should have such a desire to look at the backs of books." Johnson, ever ready for contest, instantly started from his reverie, wheeled about, and answered, "Sir, the reason is very plain. Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it." (<u>Life</u> 627)

JOHNSON: ...Gravina, an Italian critick, observes, that every man desires to see that of which he has read; but no man desires to read an account of what he has seen: so much does

description fall short of reality. Description only excites curiosity: seeing satisfies it. (Life 1218)

"...You are much surer that you are doing good when you pay money to those who work, as the recompence of their labour, than when you give money merely in charity..." (Life 756) [emphasis in original]

If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. ("Preface" to the Dictionary, in Bronson 258)

Patience and submission are very carefully to be distinguished from cowardice and indolence. We are not to repine, but we may lawfully struggle... (Rambler 32, III 177)

What cannot fail to catch the eye in the portfolio of examples presented above is how many of them are drawn from Johnson's conversation. That, however, is hardly to be wondered at: I have already noted that these distinctions

formed part of the 'public intellectual property' of the day, and so it would be perfectly natural for them to surface in the talk of the intellectual elite (of which Johnson and his circle were undoubtedly one of the ornaments).

I now want to move on to my second grouping whose items, to my way of thinking (or should I say, to my way of feeling?), reflect, over their range, changes in shading or complexion. Whereas the earlier-placed 'Distinctions of Ideas' in this grouping are still tuned (to change the metaphor) to a recognizably public 'frequency', though a decidedly fuzzier one than in the group above, those lower down in the ranking appear to manifest a more personalized Johnsonian 'timbre'. Here are my examples:

> For surely, nothing can so much...perplex the intellects of man, as the disruption [through death] of his union with visible nature...a change not only of the place, but the manner of his being; an entrance into a state not simply which he knows not, but which perhaps he has not faculties to know... (Rambler 78, IV 47)
>
> But these [hopes, "pleasures borrowed from futurity"], like all other cordials, though they

may invigorate in a small quantity, intoxicate in a greater... (Adventurer 69, II 394)

RAMSAY: ...[Pope's] poetry was highly admired in his life-time, more a great deal than after his death. JOHNSON: Sir, it has not been less admired since his death...it has only not been as much talked of, but that is owing to its being now more distant, and people having other writings to talk of. Virgil is less talked of than Pope, and Homer is less talked of than Virgil; but they are not less admired. (Life 979)

In the perusal of [Cowley's] Davideis...we are sometimes surprised, but never delighted, and find much to admire, but little to approve. ("Cowley", Lives I 55)

...instead of wasting more of my life in vain endeavours...I shall confine my care to those higher excellencies which are in every man's power; and though I cannot enchant affection by elegance and ease, hope to secure esteem by honesty and truth. (Rambler 123, IV 295)

"You may deny me to accompany you [says

Nekayah], but cannot hinder me from following." (Rasselas, in Bronson 638) [there is, in this short sentence, a pair of 'Distinctions of Ideas': deny< >hinder; accompany< >follow]

I repeated a sentence of Lord Mansfield's speech..."My Lords, severity is not the way to govern either boys or men." "Nay, (said Johnson) it is the way to govern them. I know not whether it be the way to mend them." (Life 489-90) [emphasis in original]

It is not difficult to conceive, however, that for many reasons a man writes much better than he lives. For, without entering into refined speculations, it may be shown much easier to design than to perform. (Rambler 14, III 75)

JOHNSON: ...As to the American war, the sense of the nation is with the ministry. The majority of those who can understand is with it; the majority of those who can only hear is against it. (Life 1129) [emphasis in original]

I urged him to take a little wine, he replied, "I can't drink a little, child, therefore I never touch it. Abstinence is as easy to me, as

temperance would be difficult."[48] (in Hill II 197) [emphasis in original]

JOHNSON: ...Wine makes a man better pleased with himself. I do not say that it makes him more pleasing to others. (Life 974)

...to sooth the mind to tranquillity by hope...may be sometimes useful; but to lull our faculties in a lethargy, is poor and despicable. (Adventurer 69, II 394)

[Johnson] said, "Mrs. Montagu has dropt me. Now, Sir, there are people whom one should like very well to drop, but would not wish to be dropped by." (Life 1122)

BOSWELL: Should you not like to see Dublin, Sir? JOHNSON: No, Sir! Dublin is only a worse capital. BOSWELL: Is not the Giant's-Causeway worth seeing? JOHNSON: Worth seeing? yes; but

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[48] Cf. Boswell in the Life:

> When at table...his looks seemed rivetted to his plate; nor would he...say one word...till he had satisfied his appetite, which was so fierce...that while in the act of eating, the veins of his forehead swelled... To those whose sensations were delicate, this could not but be disgusting; and it was doubtless not very suitable to the character of a philosopher, who should be distinguished by self-command. But it must be owned, that Johnson, though he could be rigidly abstemious, was not a temperate man either in eating or drinking. He could refrain, but he could not use moderately. (331) [emphasis in original]

not worth going to see. (Life 1038)

I come now to the compartment I have labelled 'Special Formations'. The items mustered under this head are as much 'Distinctions of Ideas' as any of the others and would not have been out of place in either of the preceding groupings; however, over and above their obvious character as 'Distinctions of Ideas', they exhibit other features which, while far from distinctive or significant enough to base a separate category on, are yet sufficiently conspicuous to justify their disengagement from the main body of examples and their organization as a separate subgroup. The distinguishing features referred to are of several kinds. The most prominent is a stylistic one: here the conceptual distinction is 'baked in the mould', so to speak, of a particular verbal-stylistic schema or formation. I shall be drawing attention to two such formations: 'rather X than Y' and its sibling, 'not so much X as Y'. To another distinguishing trait I have given the name 'grammatical variation': the distinctions to which this label applies are wholly built on, and mediated through, grammatical nuancing. Finally, under this head, I shall be bringing forward a couple of examples in which ideas are discriminated not in terms of the clear-cut

contrasts characterizing the items in the two preceding groupings (those involving distinctions of either a more public or a more personalized cast), but rather in terms of degrees of differentiation plotted along an imaginary continuum, so to speak. (It bears pointing out that in the two 'sibling' verbal-stylistic formations adumbrated above, the notion of differentiation in terms of degree, in terms, that is, of a scale of relative rather than absolute contrasts, is also a powerfully operative one). These kindred formations provide my first set of examples; I begin with 'Distinctions of Ideas' 'baked in the mould' of the schema 'rather X than Y' (or its variant 'X rather than Y'):

> ...my purpose [in the Ramblers is] to consider the moral discipline of the mind, and to promote the increase of virtue rather than of learning. (Rambler 8, III 42)
>
> But I considered such acts of beneficence [by patrons] as prodigies, recorded rather to raise wonder than expectation. ("Plan" of the Dictionary, in Wilson 122)
>
> [Virgil] employed his powers rather in improving, than inventing... (Rambler 37, III

200-01)

[Savage was] formed rather to bear misery with fortitude than enjoy prosperity with moderation. ("Savage", Lives II 376)

He that changes his party by his humour is not more virtuous than he that changes it by his interest; he loves himself rather than truth. ("Milton", Lives I 106)

...yet like other heroes he [Milton] is to be admired rather than imitated. (ibid. 194)

The sentiments [of Smith's play Phaedra] thus remote from life are removed yet further by the diction, which is too luxuriant and splendid for dialogue, and envelopes [sic] the thoughts rather than displays them. ("Smith", Lives II 16)

His [Congreve's] comedies...surprise rather than divert... ("Congreve", Lives II 228)

These odes [of Gray] are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments: they strike, rather than please... ("Gray", Lives III 440)

The power that predominated in his [Dryden's]

> intellectual operations was rather strong reason than quick sensibility. Upon all occasions that were presented he studied rather than felt, and produced sentiments not such as Nature enforces, but meditation supplies. ("Dryden", Lives I 457)

I find it interesting that so many of the examples built on the 'rather X than Y' schema are furnished by the Lives of the Poets. Is this perhaps evidence of a conscious effort on Johnson's part, when writing the Lives, to formulate (or at any rate give the appearance of formulating) qualified and temperate rather than categorical judgments? Next follow conceptual distinctions built on the sibling schema of 'not so much X as Y':

> "I live in the crowds of jollity [complains Rasselas], not so much to enjoy company as to shun myself..." (Rasselas, in Bronson 642)
>
> I have, therefore, prefixed a motto [to the essay], which characterises this passion [petulant rage], not so much by the mischief that it causes, as by the noise that it utters. (Rambler 11, III 57)
>
> The reigning error of his [Savage's] life was,

> that he mistook the love for the practice of virtue, and was indeed not so much a good man as the friend of goodness. ("Savage", Lives II 380)

The 'Special Formation' which follows presents the interesting phenomenon of conceptual distinctions being mediated entirely through grammatical variation. In the first of my two examples, the ideas of aspiration and achievability are played off against each other solely through the counterpointing of the subjunctive and indicative moods of the verbal auxiliaries pressed into service; in the second, where the same principle of organization applies, the idea of the volitional is played off against the idea of the imperative through the modal auxiliary (and subjunctive equivalent) 'may' being played off against the auxiliary of predication 'must':

> To a study [literary criticism] at once so easy and so reputable, so malicious and so harmless, it cannot be necessary to invite my readers by a long or laboured exhortation; it is sufficient, since all would be critics if they could, to shew by one eminent example that all can be critics if they will. (Idler 60, II 185)

> After dinner Dr. Johnson wrote a letter to Mrs. Thrale on the death of her son. I said it would be very distressing to Thrale, but she would soon forget it, as she had so many things to think of. JOHNSON: No, Sir, Thrale will forget it first. She has many things that she may think of. He has many things that he must think of. (Life 713) [emphasis in original]

In the preceding two subdivisions (those made up of 'publicly' and 'personally' complexioned distinctions), ideas tend to be discriminated in terms of clear-cut differences and strong contrasts; differentiation occurs, one might say, on the basis of kind and quality rather than of degree. But in the two examples which follow, the basis of distinction is that of degree, with the ideas in play being perceived essentially as gradations of each other. So the principle of differentiation at work here involves shifts along a continuum (meaning a scale of gradual, progressive contrasts) rather than the counterpointing of fixed and clear-cut oppositions. These are the examples:

> Wisdom and virtue are by no means sufficient without the supplemental laws of good-breeding to secure freedom from degenerating into

> rudeness, or self-esteem from swelling into insolence... (Rambler 98, IV 161)
>
> The necessity of doing something, and the fear of undertaking much, sinks the historian to a genealogist, the philosopher to a journalist of the weather, and the mathematician to a constructor of dials. (Rambler 103, IV 187)

Looking at the first of the examples given above, we observe that the contrasting ideas brought into play - the ideas of freedom (of bearing) and rudeness, of self-esteem and insolence - which Johnson, had he been so minded, could very readily have represented as qualitatively different (and which in that case would have found a natural home in either of the preceding subdivisions), are viewed instead in a relative light as really just gradations of each other, such that rudeness is portrayed as a debased form of 'freedom' and insolence as an overfed form of self-esteem. Similarly, in the second example, the paired occupations of historian and genealogist, philosopher and journalist, mathematician and dial-maker, which, again, could have been viewed as sharply distinct from, if not opposed to, each other, are seen instead as occupying relative, and not very widely separated, positions along

a continuum: thus, the historian, rather than being contrasted with the genealogist, is dwindled to one; likewise, the philosopher is dwindled to a journalist of the weather and the mathematician to a dial-maker. Now this method of differentiating ideas in terms of movements along a continuum is not much met with in the Johnsonian oeuvre: why, then, am I expatiating upon it at such length? Precisely because it is the exception that throws into relief Johnson's preference for strong, forceful differentiations, with the ideas in play being contrasted in a decisive, clear-cut manner. When his object is to suggest notions of degree, relativeness or progressivity, he ordinarily finds ways of doing so other than by portraying ideas as gradations of each other; often he avails himself of the 'rather X than Y' schema noticed above.

With these remarks I bring my examination of the category 'Distinctions of Ideas' to a close - almost. There are two further points which bear mention. First: this category is by some considerable way the most abundantly stocked of the seventeen, and the reason for that, I suspect, is that as Johnson loved sparring with ideas, and as he had a distinction-making mill of a mind,

it was only natural that many of them should end up becoming 'grist' for it. To do justice, therefore, to this capital manifestation of his distinction-making drive, and at the same time to the profusion of items with which its activity has stocked this category, I have thought it allowable, in leading my evidence, to err on the side of copiousness. The second point is this: the vast majority of the distinctions Johnson frames are in fact, in one way or another, 'distinctions of ideas'. The category actually bearing this designation is made up of distinctions of ideas which are very conspicuously that: one might think of them as 'official', 'certifiable' distinctions of ideas. But the illustrative items provisioning most of the other categories also manifest, at one level or another, 'distinctions of ideas'. This is, in a sense, unavoidable, in the 'nature of things': these items after all are composed of words, and many words, most perhaps, gesture towards ideas. So expressing 'distinctions of ideas' at some level or other is something they (the items) can hardly avoid doing. The crucial point is, though, at <u>what</u> level? That was the point I had to bear in mind all the while when it came time to classify my examples. Accordingly, the items that came to be allocated to the

categories other than 'Distinctions of Ideas' came to be so allocated because, taken overall, they mostly stood out (in my judgment) for features other than their purely conceptual content; and it therefore seemed proper to constitute them as distinct and independent categories on the basis of their most conspicuous attribute. In other words, there was something about these items that counted for more than their registering a distinction of ideas. Nevertheless, such a distinction will still, at whatever level, have been registered, unavoidably so; there is no getting away from the fact. Consequently, it cannot be denied that at a rudimentary level the great majority of my categories perforce involve 'distinctions of ideas' - but as an attribute of only subsidiary importance; what they are chiefly conspicuous for is something else.

A Specific Instance Expressly Distinguished from a more or less Undifferentiated Backdrop

This long title is a leash with only a slim category at the end of it. The items of which it consists, despite their relative scarcity in the Johnsonian oeuvre, yet seemed to me to reflect a mode of distinction-making sufficiently different from all the others to warrant their

being brought together under a separate head as an independent category. Johnson's distinction-making procedure in this category is basically the following: starting off with a more or less undifferentiated backdrop whose subject matter could be just about anything, he then trains a spotlight, so to speak, on a particular feature in it, or aspect of it, thereby isolating, that is to say, differentiating, the feature or aspect from whatever else the backdrop contains. In a few instances his choice of what to single out for special attention has the appearance of being idiosyncratic. I mean by this that given the range of options available to him, it is not easily seen (not by the ordinary understanding, anyhow) why he should fix on the one he does. In this connection the first example given below furnishes a paradigm-case: having sketched in, by way of backdrop, a gallery of villains, including a rapist (probably), a robber and a cut-throat, in addition to a liar, Johnson then singles out the liar for special condemnation. But to the ordinary understanding it is far from clear why the liar should be picked on in this way; to the ordinary understanding he is not 'obviously' worse than the other blackguards alluded to. So if he is portrayed as worse, is this not owing

simply to idiosyncrasy on Johnson's part[49]?

In the passage dealing with the liar, Johnson's proceeding in making him stand out from the backdrop is particularly emphatic and clear-cut. It is not quite as clear-cut in the remainder of the examples but is still sufficiently well defined. Deserving of notice is the occurrence in most of the items below of a qualifying 'but'; this 'but' marks the point at which the process of 'spotlighting' or singling-out begins. Here follow the examples:

> Almost every other vice that disgraces human nature, may be kept in countenance by applause and association: the corrupter of virgin innocence sees himself envied by the men, and at least not detested by the women: the drunkard may easily unite with beings, devoted like himself to noisy merriment or silent insensibility...even the robber and the cut-throat have their followers, who admire their address and intrepidity, their stratagems of rapine, and their fidelity to the gang.

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[49] Only on the face of it. In fact, what undoubtedly accounts for the special mauling he reserves for the liar in this passage is his uncompromising insistence upon, and lifelong devotion to, truthfulness (v. also infra).

The liar, and only the liar, is invariably and universally despised, abandoned, and disowned; he has no domestic consolations, which he can oppose to the censure of mankind; he can retire to no fraternity where his crimes may stand in the place of virtues; but is given up to the hisses of the multitude, without friend and without apologist. It is the peculiar condition of falsehood, to be equally detested by the good and bad. (Adventurer 50, II 362)

At all other assemblies, he that comes to receive delight, will be expected to give it; but in the theatre, nothing is necessary to the amusement of two hours, but to sit down and be willing to be pleased. (Idler 25, II 77)

Yet versification...is indispensably necessary to a poet. Every other power by which the understanding is enlightened, or the imagination enchanted, may be exercised in prose. But the poet has this peculiar superiority, that to all the powers which the perfection of every other composition can require, he adds the faculty of joining musick with reason, and of acting at

once upon the senses and the passions. (Rambler 86, IV 89)

Other men receive dignity from dress, but my booby looks always more meanly for his finery. (Idler 95, II 295)

Every other kind of [literary] adulteration, however shameful, however mischievous, is less detestable than the crime of counterfeiting characters [that is, imparting a false lustre to persons actually worthless and corrupt by recourse to "the practice of indecent and promiscuous dedication"], and fixing the stamp of literary sanction upon the dross and refuse of the world. (Rambler 136, IV 356)

Bossu is of opinion that the poet's first work is to find a moral, which his fable is afterwards to illustrate and establish. This seems to have been the process only of Milton: the moral of other poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton's only it is essential and intrinsick. ("Milton", Lives I 171) [emphasis in original]

These examples bring to a conclusion my analysis of

Johnson's distinction-making drive as it expresses itself in the domain of 'Conceptual Distinction-making'. I propose now to inquire into the way it expresses itself in the realm of 'Verbal Distinction-making'.

Verbal Distinction-making

This grouping consists of two categories of unequal size. To the smaller I have assigned the name 'Distinctions to Clarify a Word's Signification or Usage', to the larger 'Shades of Verbal Meaning: Distinctions between Near-Synonyms'. I propose to examine the smaller category first.

Distinctions to Clarify a Word's Signification or Usage

Outside the Dictionary, Johnson's distinction-making bent nowhere advertises itself in so emphatically 'lexicographic' a manner as it does in this category. Indeed, a few of the items below actually replicate the formality and deliberateness of procedure that characterize his practice in the Dictionary. What further aligns these few instances with his formal lexicographic practice is the strict and precise manner in which they specify verbal meaning, here the meaning of the words earmarked for

clarification. However, most of the items in this category are held to a less demanding standard, lexicographically speaking. Rather than formulating precisely demarcated, narrowly bounded definitions and clarifications, Johnson, adopting a more indulgent attitude, prefers in the majority of instances to trace out what may be described as a 'circumference' or 'horizon' of usage or signification - at any rate, something less formally precise, less circumscribed, more commodious. The first two of the examples given below are clearly cast in the mould of a formal dictionary definition; their specification of meaning therefore bears the stamp of 'official' lexicographic procedure: it is strict and punctilious. The remaining items are treated more permissively, with only a general 'circumference of specification' being aimed at. In sum, the distinctions Johnson formulates in this category, while certainly bearing witness to his 'lexicographic turn of mind', are not themselves 'turned', in the majority of cases, in an overtly or punctiliously lexicographic manner. I now propose to lead my evidence in support of these submissions:

> The habitations of men in the Hebrides may be distinguished into huts and houses. By a house,

I mean a building with one story over another; by a hut, a dwelling with only one floor[50]. (Journey to the Western Islands 105)

Under the denomination of highlander are comprehended in Scotland all that now speak the Erse language, or retain the primitive manners, whether they live among the mountains or in the islands; and in that sense I use the name, when there is not some apparent reason for making a distinction. (Journey 68) [Here Johnson distinguishes between mountain-dwellers and

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[50] Johnson's definitions of 'house' and 'hut' in this passage are nonce definitions expressly tailored to the specifically north-west Scottish setting and context of the Journey to the Western Islands. The same holds true for his definition of 'highlander' in the citation immediately following. In the Dictionary, where Johnson's explanations obviously reflect general usage and acceptation rather than local, "highlander" is defined simply as "an inhabitant of mountains" and "hut" as "a poor cottage", while none of the several senses given for "house" (as referring to a dwelling) makes mention of a second storey as a distinguishing characteristic. If, from a referential standpoint, Johnson's definitions in these first two examples are too specialized, too context-specific to have any useful role to play in a general dictionary, from the standpoint of structure and method their place is, as I argue above, very much in the lexicographic 'mainstream'. Indeed, if we take a closer look at his nonce definition concerning the 'habitations of men in the Hebrides', we shall see that it is modelled on a principle of organization that governs the framing of a large number of definitions in the Dictionary, the principle of per genus et differentiam (v. McLaverty 381, 388-89). In definitions proceeding per genus et differentiam, the term given first is always the most general and inclusive; this term is then further discriminated into its differentiae, its sub-categories or particularized expressions. It is immediately evident how exactly Johnson's nonce definition conforms to this pattern: first in order of placement comes the inclusive term 'habitations', discriminated forthwith into the differentiae 'huts' and 'houses', these particularizations being then defined in turn.

island-dwellers only in order to affirm that from the standpoint of 'the denomination of highlander' this is a distinction without a difference]

[Cowley's] ode on Wit is almost without a rival. It was about the time of Cowley that Wit, which had been till then used for Intellection in contradistinction to Will, took the meaning whatever it be which it now bears. ("Cowley", Lives I 36) [emphasis in original]

[Johnson] found fault with me for using the phrase to make money. "Don't you see (said he) the impropriety of it? To make money is to coin it: you should say get money"[51]. (Life 872)

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[51] In the matter of usage, as we see from this item, Johnson's 'lexicographic turn of mind' expressed itself as a vigilant fastidiousness, even finicalness. This very example, indeed, furnishes Boswell with an opportunity for descanting upon it:

> Johnson was at all times jealous of infractions upon the genuine English language, and prompt to repress colloquial barbarisms; such as, pledging myself, for undertaking; line, for department or branch, as, the civil line, the banking line. He was particularly indignant against the almost universal use of the word idea in the sense of notion or opinion, when it is clear that idea can only signify something of which an image can be formed in the mind. We may have an idea or image of a mountain, a tree, a building; but we cannot surely have an idea or image of an argument or proposition. Yet we hear the sages of the law "delivering their ideas upon the question under consideration"; and the first speakers in parliament "entirely coinciding in the idea which has been ably stated by an honourable member" - or "reprobating an idea unconstitutional, and fraught with the most dangerous consequences to a great and free country". Johnson called

[emphasis in original]

One day Mrs Gastrel set a little girl to repeat to him Cato's soliloquy, which she went through very correctly. The Doctor, after a pause, asked the child, "What was to bring Cato to an end?" She said, it was a knife. "No, my dear, it was not so." "My aunt Polly said it was a knife." "Why, aunt Polly's knife may do, but it was a dagger, my dear." (in Hill II 415) [emphasis in original]

Mrs THRALE: And "sins of moment" [in a line by Pope] is a faulty expression; for its true import is momentous, which cannot be intended. JOHNSON: It must have been written "of moments." Of moment, is momentous; of moments, momentary... (Life 990) [emphasis in original]

BOSWELL: I think, Sir, you once said to me, that not to drink wine was a great deduction from life. JOHNSON: It is a diminution of pleasure, to be sure, but I do not say a diminution of happiness. There is more happiness in being rational. ...BOSWELL: I allow there may be

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this "modern cant". (Life 873) [emphasis in original]

greater pleasure than from wine. I have had more pleasure from your conversation, I have indeed; I assure you I have. JOHNSON: When we talk of pleasure, we mean sensual pleasure. When a man says, he had pleasure with a woman, he does not mean conversation, but something of a very different nature. (Life 911-12) [This item is also an instance - in terms of an Enlightenment 'perspective on things', a near-classic one - of a distinction of ideas: pleasure vs. happiness]

By advice I would not be understood to mean, the everlasting and unvariable principles of moral and religious truth, from which no change of external circumstances can justify any deviation; but such directions as respect merely the prudential part of conduct, and which may be followed or neglected without any violation of essential duties. (Adventurer 74, II 396)

I...maintained that [fornication] did not deserve that epithet [of heinousness], in as much as it was not one of those sins which argue very great depravity of heart... JOHNSON: No,

Sir, it is not a heinous sin. A heinous sin is that for which a man is punished with death or banishment. BOSWELL: But, Sir, after I had argued that it was not a heinous sin, an old clergyman rose up, and repeating the text of scripture denouncing judgement against whoremongers, asked, whether, considering this, there could be any doubt of fornication being a heinous sin. JOHNSON: Why, Sir, observe the word whoremonger. Every sin, if persisted in, will become heinous. Whoremonger is a dealer in whores, as ironmonger is a dealer in iron. But as you don't call a man an ironmonger for buying and selling a penknife; so you don't call a man a whoremonger for getting one wench with child. (Life 479) [emphasis in original] [This item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy']

Good humour may be defined [as] a...state between gayety and unconcern... (Rambler 72, IV 13)

Johnson had accustomed himself to use the word lie, to express a mistake or an errour in

relation; in short, when the thing was not so as told, though the relator did not mean to deceive. When he thought there was intentional falsehood in the relator, his expression was, "He lies, and he knows he lies"[52]. (Life 1101)

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[52] Two points need to be made about this eccentric distinction between error and falsehood in terms of gradations of mendacity. First, it plainly answers not to any general acceptation or understanding of the word "lie" - the proof of which is that in the Dictionary, whose definitions (barring a handful of notorious exceptions) certainly reflect general acceptation so far as verbal meaning is concerned, the noun "lie" is defined as "a criminal falsehood" - but rather to a private and quirky Johnsonian one. (For an example of Johnson's quirkiness in action, consider the following anecdote by Mr Wickins, a draper of Lichfield, upon whom Johnson used to call during visits to his native town: "Walking one day with him in my garden at Lichfield, we entered a small meandering shrubbery...I observed, that he might perhaps conceive that he was entering an extensive labyrinth, but that it would prove a deception, though I hoped not an unpardonable one. 'Sir,' said he, 'don't tell me of deception; a lie, Sir, is a lie, whether it be a lie to the eye or a lie to the ear.'" In Hill II 427-28)

In speculating about the reason for Johnson's quirky use of "lie", one is led yet again to the conjecture that at the bottom of it all lies his ardent and inflexible dedication to truthfulness, such that deviations even in error from strict accuracy in relation still count in his eyes as sufficiently discreditable to qualify as 'lying'. In terms of this hypothesis, one would then characterize his peculiar use of "lie" as a kind of reflex grounded in visceral reactions. But in a different mood, or a different role, Johnson is capable of upholding not merely a different, but a quite opposite, viewpoint. When he dons the mantle of the ratiocinative, detached Sage pronouncing professorially ex cathedra, as it were, he speaks not only in different tones, he also speaks different things. And the cleavage between his 'visceral' voice and his 'professorial' one is nowhere more strikingly dramatized than precisely in this domain of what counts as 'lying' - which brings us to the second, and related, point: for the very thing that Johnson in the citation above categorizes as 'lying' (i.e. an error in relation), he elsewhere (in a passage already quoted) categorizes as "moral truth". These are his words: "Moral truth, is, when you tell a thing sincerely and precisely as it appears to you. I say such a one walked across the street; if he really did so, I told a physical truth. If I thought so, though I should have been mistaken, I told a moral truth" (Life 1069). The contradiction between what he says here and what is recorded in the citation above is total: here an error in relation counts as 'moral truth'; in the citation above it counts as 'lying'. But to note the contradiction is less important than to try to account for it; and in

[emphasis in original]

To end this muster of examples on a more diverting note, let me offer what amounts to a parody of 'official' lexicographic procedure; I don't quite know how to characterize this item - shall we call it an example of 'cultural' lexicography?

TO THE IDLER

SIR,

I have a wife that keeps good company. You know that the word good varies its meaning

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this connection the point to bear in mind is the context of the statement on 'moral truth': it is a notably formal one in which Johnson, wearing the mantle of the Sage, pronounces authoritatively, even donnishly, from the Dais of Learning. (One is reminded here of Mrs Thrale's observation that Johnson "did not wish to confound, but to inform his auditors...he always wished to retain authority, and leave his company impressed with the idea, that it was his to teach in this world, and theirs to learn." In Sherbo 120).

The conclusion to which I am led by the line of argument I have been following is this: when Johnson calls an error in relation 'moral truth', it is his head which speaks, when he calls it 'lying', it is his heart speaking. To my mind, not only the contradiction brought to light here, but quite a number of others as well are traceable to, and should be viewed in the context of, the strife between Johnson's head and heart, from which he never really gained relief as long as he lived. Paul Fussell's verdict is germane in this connection: "Of all the Augustan humanists Johnson remains for us as for his contemporaries the prime exemplar of a splendid human inconsistency. ...Reynolds noticed that 'From passion, from the prevalence of his disposition for the minute, he was continually acting contrary to his reason...'" (1965:124). (For more on the 'inner war' between Johnson's head and heart, as viewed mostly from the biographical and temperamental standpoints, see B H Bronson's essays "Johnson Agonistes" and "The Double Tradition of Dr Johnson" (1965); also Stuart Gerry Brown's essay "Dr Johnson and the Old Order" (in Greene 158-171); as viewed mostly from the literary standpoint, see Fussell (1972) Chapter 2, "The Facts of Writing and the Johnsonian Senses of Literature")

> according to the value set upon different qualities in different places. To be a good man in a college, is to be learned; in a camp to be brave; and in the city to be rich. By good company in the place which I have the misfortune to inhabit, we understand not always those from whom any good can be learned, whether wisdom or virtue; or by whom any good can be conferred, whether profit or reputation. Good company is the company of those whose birth is high, and whose riches are great, or of those whom the the rich and noble admit to familiarity. (Idler 53, II 164-65)

Well, so much for this, the most conspicuously 'lexicographic' of all the categories in the present study. To the larger of the categories in this grouping of 'Verbal Distinction-making' I have assigned the name 'Shades of Verbal Meaning: Distinctions between Near-Synonyms'. It is to this topic that I now turn.

Shades of Verbal Meaning: Distinctions between Near-Synonyms

In my remarks prefatory to the discussion of

'Distinctions of Ideas', I argued that the crucial difference between that category and the one I am about to analyse bears upon how and where the 'fields of signification' surrounding words (or ideas) are disposed relative to one another. Whereas these 'fields' lie close by in the case of 'Distinctions of Ideas', they actually overlap, to a greater or less degree (though never completely), where 'Distinctions between Near-Synonyms' are concerned - this being the reason, of course, for the occurrence in the first place of the phenomenon of near-synonymy.

One has to be careful in the present context to speak of 'near-synonyms' (that is, words 'near-allied', situated within the same 'semantic field'), and not of 'synonyms' - and this for two reasons: first, if one's conceptual point of departure is the notion of 'true' synonymy (assuming such a thing exists), it follows that distinction-making can have no role to play since in 'true' synonymy there exist no differences to be distinguished; second: Johnson held the view that in any case language does not in principle admit 'true' synonymy since it has no need, in principle, of more than one word to denote one thing[53].

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[53] Consider this passage from the "Preface" to the Dictionary: "Words are seldom exactly synonimous; a new term was not introduced, but

How then have words universally taken to be synonymous (and often referred to as 'equivalent terms') come into being? Through various forms of linguistic sloppiness and dereliction, in Johnson's view (v. Life 1225, a passage I have already cited within the frame of my discussion early in this chapter of Johnson's quest for determinate verbal meaning). But since, as he fully realized, a living language's 'sack of accumulated linguistic sin' cannot just be wished away, it becomes necesary to deal with language as it is, not as it might be or ought to be, while yet striving to counteract, and if possible to correct, the grosser consequences of past linguistic malpractice. Of these 'grosser consequences', one would certainly be the widespread tendency among users of a language to regard as synonyms, and hence to employ interchangeably, words that

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because the former was thought inadequate: names, therefore, have often many ideas, but few ideas have many names" (in Bronson 246). This view finds an echo in the theories of twentieth- century linguists "like Ogden and Richards and Lyons [who]...argue that absolute or true synonymy is rare in natural languages: that we ordinarily make do with mere 'similarity' of meaning, rather than 'sameness'" (Wales 27). By way of underlining the modernity of Johnson's viewpoint on synonymy, let me cite a judgment formulated in 1960 by the eminent philosopher of language, Willard Quine; I don't believe Johnson would have found much to quarrel with in it as it is, in essentials, a reflection of his own position. Quine writes:

> ...there are some [paraphrases], of course, that prove pretty regularly to work out all right... In them, one may in a non-technical spirit speak fairly enough of synonymy, if the claim is recognized as a vague one and a matter of degree. But in the pattest of paraphrasing one courts confusion and obscurity by imagining some absolute synonymy as goal. (161)

are not synonymous at all, though they may be 'near-allied'. It is with an eye to correcting, or at least curbing, this abuse of language that in his Plan for the Dictionary (1747) Johnson insists that the "difference of signification in words generally accounted synonimous, ought to be carefully observed" (in Wilson 133-34). When it comes to the practicalities of actually bringing into view these differences commonly occulted and unremarked, he has recourse to basically two methods, this duality of procedure furnishing the organizing principle for the presentation of my evidence.

Casting about for brief tags by means of which to label his alternative methods of "separating similitudes" (Bronson (1971) 253), I finally decided to characterize the one as 'structural' or 'architectural' and the other as 'explicatory'. When Johnson is being 'structural' about distinguishing between near-synonyms, what he does is to contrive locutions in which they are brought into juxtaposition specifically for the purpose of being played off against each other; so here it is the juxtaposition as such, that is, the very architecture of the collocation, that functions to bring to the fore the fact that the supposedly equivalent terms are in truth not equivalent at

all, that they gesture towards different things. But in what precisely the difference consists, that Johnson does not spell out; the structure and organization of the locution having brought to the reader's notice the certain fact of a difference of signification between terms supposedly equivalent, he is then left to figure out the substance of the difference for himself (in practice, once the fact of a distinction between terms 'near-allied' has been pointed up, it is then not that difficult to deduce its substance). In the hope of rendering these rather theoretical remarks more intelligible I hasten to exemplify: in the "Preface" to the Dictionary Johnson writes:

> I then contracted my design, determining to confide in myself, and no longer to solicit auxiliaries...by this I obtained at least one advantage, that I set limits to my work, which would in time be ended, though not completed. (in Bronson 253)

As we observe, the near-synonyms 'ended' and 'completed' are brought into juxtaposition in order to be played off against each other (in this instance through elegant counterpoise on either side of the adversative

locution "though not"), and it is through this device alone, an exclusively structural one, that Johnson contrives to make it absolutely clear that whatever it is they signify they at least cannot signify the same thing; he makes it clear, in other words, that though they may be widely regarded as 'equivalent terms', if they are, they are mistakenly and misguidedly so regarded. Since Johnson's method here is 'structural', he forbears to give any indication of that in which the difference between the two signifiers consists; he leaves it to the reader to work that out[54]. There are however times when he offers a hint; but provided it is feeble enough not to alter the basically 'structural' character of the locution it appears in, I have thought the locution best left under the 'structural/architectural' head; where the hint is sufficiently broad, I have grouped the item in question

[54] It is also possible, in some cases, though not, to my mind, in the case of 'ended< >completed', that the points of difference between near-synonyms may be so fine as actually to defy explanation or specification. In these circumstances, the best one could do would be to bring them into juxtaposition in the hope that their being thus played off against each other would force into the open, or at least to the threshold of cognition, or even just of intuition, differences that would otherwise elude ordinary human intelligence - "distinctions too subtle for common eyes", in Johnson's phrase (Idler 3, II 10). It would appear that he has in mind a situation of just this kind, as well as a solution (or, more exactly, an expedient) along the lines suggested above, when, in the "Preface" to the Dictionary, he refers to "Ideas of the same race, [which] though not exactly alike, are sometimes so little different, that no words can express the dissimilitude, though the mind easily perceives it, when they are exhibited together" (in Bronson 247).

with those illustrative of Johnson's 'explicatory' method. When is a hint 'sufficiently feeble' or 'sufficiently broad'? This is of course almost wholly a matter of one's subjective judgment but (to clarify the complexion of mine through an example) it seems to me that the item

> Without intelligence man is not social, he is only gregarious... (Journey 132)

is still substantially a 'structurally' based collocation, like 'ended< >completed' above; what most distinguishes it, to my mind, is the playing-off against each other, through juxtaposition, of the near-synonyms 'social' and 'gregarious'; that being so, it is rather the fact of a distinction between these words 'near-allied' that the collocation brings to the fore than the substance of that distinction. As I see it, what the initial phrase "Without intelligence" contributes is too little to tip the balance: it offers the hint that intelligence has something to do with the distinction between sociableness and mere gregariousness, but that is as far as it goes; set against the comparative density of specification that characterizes Johnson's 'explicatory' method, this hint has to count as a 'feeble' one - too feeble to alter the essentially 'structural' character of the collocation taken as a whole.

Viewing this item and those like it, then, as exemplars of Johnson's 'structural' method, I have accordingly billetted them under that head.

The argument presented above has perhaps already brought into view the essential characteristic of the 'explicatory' method which, to state it formally, entails Johnson's actually fleshing out and in some way or other clarifying the points of difference (fine ones, as often as not) on which the distinctions between the near-synonyms turn; in other words, under this method it is not merely the <u>fact</u> of a distinction between near-synonyms that is registered, the actual <u>substance</u> of the distinction is specified as well. This specification takes a number of forms: sometimes Johnson offers a rather full explanation, more often an elaboration that falls short of real explanation, sometimes only a gloss; alternatively, he may furnish an elucidatory context or perhaps subjoin illustrative instances; or he may make use of an analogy, or, again, rely on the elucidatory capacity of other parts of speech, ordinarily adjectives and nouns, with which the near-synonyms are concatenated, in order to bring out the points of difference between them. Rather than individually tagging the items I shall be citing with

reference to one or other of the procedures noted here, I prefer to exhibit in a more general way how Johnson's 'explicatory' method works by adducing and glossing at this juncture a couple of illustrative instances. It seems to me that once the general principle of operation is grasped, it will not be difficult to label correctly its particularized manifestations. So, then, to fall to examples: in a letter to Boswell, Johnson thus characterizes the addressee's father, recently deceased: "...his disposition towards you was undoubtedly that of a kind, though not of a fond father". And then, immediately after this statement, an elaboration is framed which spotlights one of the essential points of difference between 'kind' and 'fond', words that are near neighbours within their shared semantic field: "Kindness, at least actual, is in our power, but fondness is not; and if by negligence or imprudence you had extinguished his fondness, he could not at will rekindle it" (Life 1187). In the next example it is the adjectives, to which the near-allied nouns 'hilarity' and 'merriment' are 'tethered', that function to bring out some of the key differences between them:

> [Sir Joshua REYNOLDS]: ...I am sure that

> moderate drinking makes people talk better. JOHNSON: No, Sir; wine gives not light, gay, ideal hilarity; but tumultuous, noisy, clamorous merriment. (Life 746)

From the examples here furnished, few though they be, of Johnson's two methods of distinguishing between near-synonyms, it is observable that each contains its own balance-sheet of losses and gains. What the 'structural' method gains in tautness, sharpness of outline and, at times, almost epigrammatic concentration, thanks to the architectural clarity and verbal spareness of its juxtapositions, it loses in informativeness because the actual substance of the distinctions between the near-synonyms is not, or is barely, specified. Conversely, what the 'explicatory' method gains in informativeness through the specification of points of difference between the near-synonyms it not seldom loses in tightness and trenchancy. With these remarks the preliminaries are concluded; it is now time to present the evidence. I begin with examples illustrative of Johnson's 'structural' method.

> A short residence at London entitles a man...to a despotick and dictatorial power of prescribing to the rude multitude... (Rambler 61, III 326)

An even and unvaried tenour of life always hides from our apprehension the approach of its end. (Idler 103, II 315)

The plot [of Measure for Measure] is rather intricate than artful. (Johnson on Shakespeare VII 216)

The "strength of Denham"...is to be found in many lines and couplets, which...exhibit the sentiment with more weight than bulk. ("Denham", Lives I 79-80)

Most of these petty faults are in his [Denham's] first productions, when he was less skilful or, at least, less dexterous in the use of words... (ibid. 82)

"Sir," says he gravely..."what you say is true, the times are altered, for power is now nowhere, we live under a government of influence, not of power..." (in Hill II 55)

The art is, to fill the day with petty business...and keep the mind in a state of action, but not of labour. (Idler 31, II 97)

...of those with whom interest or opinion united him he [Addison] had not only the esteem, but

the kindness; and of others, whom the violence of opposition drove against him, though he might lose the love, he retained the reverence. ("Addison", Lives II 125)

All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can controul and repress, it is not visible to others... (Rasselas, in Bronson 693)

"His [Goldsmith's] genius is great, but his knowledge is small". (Life 495)

The consequence of a bad season is here [in the Hebrides] not scarcity, but emptiness. (Journey 133)

Raleigh is deservedly celebrated for the labour of his researches...but he has endeavoured to exert his judgment more than his genius...and has produced an historical dissertation, but seldom risen to the majesty of history. (Rambler 122, IV 289) [The word 'majesty' which Johnson here recruits presumably for the purpose of bringing into focus essential points of difference between a 'historical dissertation' and a 'history' is, to my mind, deficient in

that very department. Too unspecific to lay hold of what crucially differentiates these terms/concepts 'near-allied', it has accordingly to be classed as a 'feeble hint' (v. supra) - too feeble to impart an 'explicatory' quality the collocation it features in. As a result, the 'structural' character of the collocation remains dominant; that being so, its proper home is the present grouping]

The following item, characterized by multiple near-synonymy, is a hybrid in which 'structural' components (baffle< >perplex; confines< >inclosures) are conjoined with 'explicatory' ones ('licentious', elucidated as 'unsusceptible of limitations'; 'vagrant', elucidated as 'impatient of restraint'):

> Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity. (Rambler 125, IV 300)

Johnson must have felt confident that his public sufficiently understood the difference between a poet and

a versifier (alternatively, between a poet and a rhymester), as he repeatedly plays these near-synonyms off against each other without further comment:

> This play [Dryden's Aureng Zebe] is addressed to the earl of Mulgrave...himself, if not a poet, yet a writer of verses... ("Dryden", Lives I 361)
>
> His [Addison's] next paper of verses [was]...inscribed to Henry Sacheverell, who was then, if not a poet, a writer of verses... ("Addison", Lives II 83)
>
> His [Milton's] character of Dryden, who sometimes visited him, was that he was a good rhymist, but no poet. ("Milton", Lives I 154)

I have come across only one instance in which Johnson undertakes actually to elucidate, through the provision of further information, the distinction between a poet and a versifier. With this item I accordingly initiate my schedule of examples illustrative of his 'explicatory' method:

> Of Broome, though it cannot be said that he was a great poet, it would be unjust to deny that he was an excellent versifyer; his lines are smooth

and sonorous, and his diction is select and elegant. ("Broome", Lives III 80)

[Prior's] numbers are such as mere diligence may attain; they seldom offend the ear, and seldom sooth it...what is smooth is not soft. His verses always roll, but they seldom flow. ("Prior", Lives II 210)

Though his usual phrase for conversation was talk, yet he made a distinction; for when he once told me that he dined the day before at a friend's house...and I asked him if there was good conversation, he answered, "No, Sir; we had talk enough, but no conversation; there was nothing discussed." (Life 1210) [emphasis in original]

If the Commons have only the power of dismissing for a few days the man whom his constituents can immediately send back, if they can expel but cannot exclude, they have nothing more than nominal authority, to which perhaps obedience never may be paid. ("The False Alarm", X 325)

[Johnson on Soame Jennings's describing as a 'contradiction in terms' Pascal's reference to

'infinite number']: "I think...we must settle the matter thus: numeration is certainly infinite, for eternity might be employed in adding unit to unit; but every number is in itself finite, as the possibility of doubling it easily proves..." (Mrs Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson in Sherbo 87)

But Falstaff unimitated, unimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be admired, but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested. Falstaff is a character loaded with faults, and with those faults which naturally produce contempt. ...Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety...[and] easy escapes and sallies of levity, which make sport but raise no envy. (Johnson on Shakespeare, VII 523)

...he who differs from us, does not always contradict us; he has one view of an object, and we have another; each describes what he sees

with equal fidelity, and each regulates his steps by his own eyes: one man... looks on celibacy as a state of gloomy solitude...the other considers it...as a state free from incumbrances, in which a man is at liberty to chuse his own gratifications... (Adventurer 107, II 445)

BEAUCLERK [speaking of George Steevens]: He is very malignant. JOHNSON: No, Sir; he is not malignant. He is mischievous, if you will. He would do no man an essential injury; he may, indeed, love to make sport of people by vexing their vanity. (Life 939) [The dextrous distinction Johnson frames here elicits from Boswell the comment that his friend "delighted in discrimination of character" (ibid. 939-40)]

The allegation of resemblance between authors is indisputably true; but the charge of plagiarism, which is raised upon it, is not to be allowed with equal readiness. A coincidence of sentiment may easily happen without any communication, since there are many occasions in which all reasonable men will nearly think

alike. (Adventurer 95, II 425)

The reigning philosophy informs us, that the vast bodies which constitute the universe, are regulated in their progress through the etherial spaces, by the perpetual agency of contrary forces...

The same contrariety of impulse may be perhaps discovered in the motions of men: we are formed for society, not for combination; we are equally unqualified to live in a close connection with our fellow beings, and in total separation from them. (Adventurer 45, II 359-60) [this item is simultaneously - and ceremoniously - an instance of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy']

I presumed to animadvert on his eulogy on Garrick, in his Lives of the Poets ["Smith", II 21]. "You say, Sir, his death eclipsed the gaiety of nations." JOHNSON: I could not have said more nor less. It is the truth; eclipsed, not extinguished; and his death did eclipse; it was like a storm. (Life 1021) [emphasis in original]

...of Cato it has been not unjustly determined that it is rather a poem in dialogue than a drama, rather a succession of just sentiments in elegant language than a representation of natural affections... ("Addison", Lives II 132)

The foresight of the [Hebridean] seers is not always prescience: they are impressed with images, of which the event only shews them the meaning. (Journey 112)

I wish you had staid longer in Spain, for no country is less known to the rest of Europe; but the quickness of your discernment must make amends for the celerity of your motions. He that knows which way to direct his view, sees much in a little time. (Letter to Joseph Baretti: Letters I 135)

[Imprisoned in Newgate, Savage] now found that his friends were only companions, who were willing to share his gaiety, but not to partake of his misfortunes... ("Savage", Lives II 422)

We talked of Mr Burke. Dr Johnson said, he had great variety of knowledge, store of imagery, copiousness of language. ROBERTSON: He has wit

too. JOHNSON: No, sir; he never succeeds there. 'Tis low; 'tis conceit. (Hebrides Journal 172)

Vanity, the most innocent species of pride... ("Savage", Lives II 432)

The category 'Distinctions between Near-Synonyms' contains a formation that lays claim to special notice. This is the schema 'X without Y', as articulated, for example, in the collocations "motion without progress", "bustle without business". The principal reason for this locution's asserting a claim to special attention is that its use signals, indeed occasions, a confluence of the 'structural' and the 'explicatory' methods. This confluence takes the form of 'explicatory' discourse (informative and elucidatory in its tendency) either surrounding or leading up to the 'X without Y' formation whose aphoristic concentration and schematic modelling mark it out as unmistakably a 'structural' one. Where this formation (which, with respect to its differentiating function, works in exactly the same way as the schema 'X but not Y'[55]) appears in the middle of a passage of

[55] To set these two formations over against each other is to bring clearly into focus how much of an advantage 'X without Y' enjoys over 'X but not Y' in point of elegance and epigrammatic concision, although in point of signifying and differentiating power there is nothing to choose between them.

'explicatory' matter, it serves as its 'fulcrum', its 'centre of gravity', so to speak; when it appears at the end, it then becomes that passage's terminus, the point upon which its 'lines of force' converge. Once the items exhibiting the 'X without Y' formation in a terminal position are brought together in a muster of their own, however, what leaps to notice is the fact that the formation is in every case doubled through recourse to the technique of parallel construction, although it is also noteworthy that invariably only one of the doubled collocations presents a distinction structured on elements genuinely near-allied. The reason for the doubling is traceable to Johnson's belief that the terminus of a prose passage (be it the end of a sentence or of a paragraph) is a site particularly well adapted to the enforcement of emphasis both rhetorical and rhythmical. Underpinning this belief are two others: first, his subscribing to a "principle of 'cadence' in prose style, which required the placing of the emphasis at the end"[56] (Gray 204) and,

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[56] Germane in this connection is the following passage from the Life:

> JOHNSON: Sir William Temple was the first writer who gave cadence to English prose. Before his time they were careless of arrangement, and did not mind whether a sentence ended with an important word or an insignificant word, or with what part of speech it was concluded. (921)

As for Johnson's own partiality to 'cadence', this is a trait incisively commented on by William Hazlitt who, rightly, it seems to me, discerned in it a compulsive element: "Johnson wrote a kind of

second, his persuasion that the inner 'lines of force', both rhetorical and architectonic, of a prose writing ordinarily and naturally (meaning not only where the 'X without Y' formula comes into the picture) converge upon its point of closure, making that the proper place for the play of emphasis[57]. It follows, then, with reference to

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rhyming prose, in which he was as much compelled to finish the different clauses of his sentences, and to balance one period against another, as the writer of heroic verse is to keep to lines of ten syllables with similar terminations" (Preface to Characters of Shakespear's Plays xxii). Hazlitt elsewhere observes, in similar vein, that in the structure of Johnson's sentences "one clause answers to another in measure and quantity...the close of the period follows as mechanically as the oscillation of a pendulum, the sense is balanced with the sound; each sentence...is contained within itself like a couplet, and each paragraph forms itself into a stanza" (Lectures on the English Comic Writers 102).

The Reverend Robert Burrowes, in his perspicacious "Essay on the Stile of Doctor Samuel Johnson" (1786), argues that Johnson's "desire of harmony" (in Boulton 340), which would appear to be simply his predilection for cadence by another name, was such as to prompt him to press into service even the "minute ornament of alliteration" which, he continues, "is so often casual...that it is difficult to charge it on an author's intentions. But Johnson employs it so frequently, and continues it through so many words...that when we consider too how nearly allied it is as an ornament to parallelism, we have I think sufficient grounds to determine it as not involuntary" (idem).

[57] In this connection the following remarks by Wimsatt are pertinent. I cite first his sketch of the state of psychological conditioning that leads readers to expect, and to welcome, emphatic accentuation at the end of a prose 'curve':

> On the expectation that the end of a period will say something important...the mind...is satisfied to find at the end of a period a word emphatic (or important) in sense and supported by an emphasis or weight of sound. This is a rule of emphasis which Johnson himself hardly ever disregards. (1941:156)

I turn the spotlight next on to Wimsatt's account of the way in which Johnson actually gives effect to the 'rule' of terminal emphasis; seeking to make Johnson's method stand out, he contrasts it with Hazlitt's:

> Early in Hazlitt's sentence come two triplets...partly sensory, asyndetic, hurried; they provide a momentary emphasis, after which the sentence rushes on antithetically...leaving the triplets back by the way...

the second set of examples given below, that the doubling of the 'X without Y' schema at the end of the prose 'curve' reflects the dictates (as Johnson understood them) of 'cadence' and of an inner thrust towards terminal emphasis. That these impulsions, these dynamic forces at work within prose discourse should so often in the oeuvre come to expression in the form of the parallel construction, as they do not only in the second batch of items but also in a very large number of instances that owe nothing whatever to the 'X without Y' schema, is no surprise and no accident, seeing that this is a construction which so admirably harmonizes the claims of cadence and of emphasis[58] (and which for that very reason proved to be one

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> Johnson does the opposite. He begins slowly, building up through couplets...until he makes a climax of his two deliberate triplets, smashingly, one upon the other. And so with many a doublet; where it is jammed into the rush and preparation of the early part of one of Hazlitt's sentences...it is by Johnson saved till the end, the weightiest motive of the whole, toward which the whole labors up and having reached which, has accomplished its destination. (ibid. 37)

[58] The species of emphasis alluded to here involves structural duplication through parallelism, but not duplication of meaning (a point underscored by the fact, noted above, that invariably only one of the doubled 'X without Y' locutions contains a distinction built on terms genuinely near-allied). This mode of emphasis is therefore not to be confounded with the kind of 'emphasis' Wimsatt has in mind when he accuses Johnson of sometimes 'multiplying words' for the sake of 'emphasis' alone (v. infra); the two types of emphasis are quite distinct from each other, Wimsatt's having reference to the duplication of meaning, not of structure. He himself calls attention to this very point, declaring, "I mean emphasis absolutely...not what might be called balance...of emphasis, an effect common to all strong writing and achievable in various ways according to the tendencies of

of Johnson's favourite rhetorical devices). So much for exposition, now let the examples speak for themselves; in the batch which follows, the 'X without Y' formation occupies a 'fulcrum' position in the middle of the passage:

> A new paper lies under the same disadvantages as a new play. There is danger lest it be new without novelty. My earlier predecessors [in the line of periodical journalism] had their choice of vices and follies... they had the whole field of life before them, untrodden and unsurveyed...They that follow are forced to peep into neglected corners...and to recommend themselves by minute industry... (Idler 3, II 9-10) [The 'new paper' referred to was the Universal Chronicle in which the Idler series was published]
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> The opinions prevalent in one age, as truths above the reach of controversy, are confuted and rejected in another, and rise again to reception in remoter times. Thus the human mind is kept

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the author. Johnson, for example, having used an adjective and noun at the beginning of a sentence or clause, will often find it necessary to use another adjective and noun...at the end. ...It is to be observed that [such] constructions though parallel in form are not parallel in substance..." (1941:32-33 [footnote 70]).

in motion without progress. Thus sometimes truth and errour, and sometimes contrarieties of errour, take each other's place by reciprocal invasion. ("Preface" to Shakespeare, in Bronson 295)

This profession [literary criticism] has one recommendation peculiar to itself, that it gives vent to malignity without real mischief. No genius was ever blasted by the breath of critics. (Idler 60, II 185)

Yet as much...of the pleasure which our condition allows, must be produced by giving elegance to trifles, it is necessary to learn how to become little without becoming mean, to maintain the necessary intercourse of civility, and fill up the vacuities of action by agreeable appearances. (Rambler 152, V 44)

In the following set of items the 'X without Y' schema occupies a terminal position:

I passed some years in the most contemptible of all human stations, that of a soldier in time of peace...Wherever I came I was for a time a stranger without curiosity, and afterwards an

acquaintance without friendship. (Idler 21, II 66)

...Gelaleddin...a young man...of quick apprehension and tenacious memory, accurate without narrowness, and eager for novelty without inconstancy. (Idler 75, II 232)

...those whom Otway frequented had no purpose of doing more for him than to pay his reckoning. They desired only to drink and laugh; their fondness was without benevolence, and their familiarity without friendship. ("Otway", Lives I 243)

[Addison's] prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without apparent elaboration. ("Addison", Lives II 149)

[Dryden's] account of Shakespeare may stand as a perpetual model of encomiastick criticism; exact without minuteness, and lofty without exaggeration. ("Dryden", Lives I 412)

If we consider it [the ideal community] with

regard to publick happiness, it would be opulent without luxury, and powerful without faction. (Sermons, XIV 60)

Many...find quiet shameful, and business dangerous, and therefore pass their lives between them, in bustle without business, and in negligence without quiet. (Idler 19, II 60)

Finally, a densely-packed specimen in which the 'X without Y' schema appears both in the middle of the statement, where it is doubled, and at the end, where it is trebled[59]:

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[59] Not a few critics have been struck by Johnson's predilection for triadic constructions, a predilection which, while making itself felt often enough in the oeuvre, appears to have no special connection with his distinction-making bent. Here follows a sampling of critical opinion, all of it by eighteenth-century commentators whose remarks on this subject strike me as more piquant and lively than the judgments of later critics:

> *[Johnson] illustrates till he fatigues...he is so apt to explain the same thought by three different sets of phrases heaped on each other, that if I did not condemn his laboured coinage of words, I would call his threefold inundation of parallel expressions Triptology. (Horace Walpole (c. 1779) in Boulton 325)
>
> *An ingenious essayist says, that in the Rambler "the constant recurrence of sentences in the form of what have been called triplets, is disgusting to all readers". The recurrence is indeed very frequent; but it certainly is not constant, nor we hope always disgusting: and as what he calls the triplet is unquestionably the most energetic form of which an English sentence is susceptible, we cannot help thinking, that it should frequently recur in detached essays, of which the object is to inculcate moral truths. (George Gleig (1797) in Boulton 73) [emphasis in original]
>
> *Johnson's triods occur so frequently, that I find myself always led aside to wonder, that all the effects from the same cause should be so often discovered reducible to the mystical number three: I torment myself to find a reason

> [Goldsmith was a writer] who had the art of being minute without tediousness, and general without confusion; whose language was copious without exuberance, exact without constraint, and easy without weakness. ("Parnell", Lives II 49)

The examples, both 'structural' and 'explicatory', presented above constitute a body of evidence which demonstrably bears out Kathleen Wales's at-first-sight paradoxical judgment that the function of near-synonyms in Johnson's oeuvre is "to show distinction, rather than similarity" (26). In advancing this view Wales comes into collision with W K Wimsatt who, in his The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson, submits that some at least of Johnson's nearly-synonymous collocations are framed not so much with the intention of pointing up differences of signification as with the intention simply of achieving rhetorical "emphasis" through the "multiplication" of words (21, 22, 99, 101), the result of this being a needless duplication of meaning. Wimsatt's submission, while not quite

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> for that particular order in which the effects are recited, and I am involuntarily delayed to consider, whether some are not omitted which have a right to be inserted, or some enumerated which due discretion would have suppressed. (The Reverend Robert Burrowes (1786) in Boulton 340)

amounting to an allegation that Johnson was sometimes guilty of using words as mere 'verbal filler'[60], has the effect however of bracketing him with those writers who believe (mistakenly, Wimsatt implies) that "a multiplication of notions about one thing is not a repetition of one meaning" (ibid. 102). Wimsatt's criticism of Johnson on the score of "multiplication for emphasis" (ibid. 99) obviously does not appertain to cases in which an intention to distinguish is clearly signalled, ordinarily through recourse to conjunctions denotative of contrast, qualification or concession (conjunctions like 'but', 'yet', 'although'), but rather to cases in which the

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[60] This is, of course, precisely Macaulay's allegation, part of his notorious attack, in the essay of 1831, on the "characteristic faults of [Johnson's] style". Macaulay indeed accuses Johnson of being <u>often</u> guilty of using words as mere 'verbal filler', referring to "[h]is constant practice of padding out a sentence with useless epithets, till it became as stiff as the bust of an exquisite" (II 560). Responding to this allegation, Donald J Greene retorts that "no English prose writer is less given than Johnson to 'padding out' sentences with 'useless epithets'. Every word counts" ("Johnson and Imagery", in Lascelles 143). I think Greene is right on target here. A moment's reflection will make it clear, moreover, that in insisting that in Johnson's discourse 'every word counts', Greene is defending a standpoint with which Wales's, formulated twenty years later, plainly has a great deal in common: for her critique of Wimsatt's contention that Johnson sometimes 'multiplies words' for the sake of rhetorical 'emphasis' alone must ensue from an outlook akin to Greene's, that is, from a conviction that in Johnson's discourse 'every word counts' in its own right, meaning that every word traces out an 'horizon of signification' peculiar to itself - and therefore that it neither duplicates, nor is duplicated by, the 'horizons' of any of the words collocated with it. Given the congruence between Wales's and Greene's standpoints, it follows in logic that I cannot believe Greene to be right over against Macaulay without believing the same to be true of Wales in relation to Wimsatt. That I judge her to have the better of the argument is indeed sufficiently clear from the exposition above.

occurrence of near-synonyms on either side of the co-ordinating conjunction 'and' appears to give countenance to the supposition that what is being striven for is not so much the pointing up of semantic difference as the accretion of 'equivalent terms' simply for the sake of rhetorical emphasis - for the sake of a rhetorical 'flourish'. Wimsatt offers quite a number of examples of locutions built on the schema 'X and Y' which, he maintains, are illustrative of 'multiplication for [simple] emphasis'; here is a sampling: "the constituent and fundamental principle" (21); "troubles and commotions" (22); "activity and sprightliness" (22); "a sedate and quiescent quality" (35); "readiness and dexterity" (36); "vehement and rapid" (36).

Wales's method of confuting Wimsatt is to bring forward word-pairs of the 'X and Y' type consisting of elements that manifest a degree of 'semantic overlap' as great as, or even greater than, that found in the examples adduced by Wimsatt, and then to demonstrate that Johnson's purpose, far from being the rhetorical one of multiplying supposedly 'equivalent terms' simply for the sake of emphasis, is rather, in her phrase, "to show distinction" (26); that is, to bring into view the admittedly fine but

nonetheless important differences of signification between words commonly taken to be synonymous. At this point I propose to offer a digest of Wales's analysis which recruits some of the same items as are adduced in the 'structural' listing given above.

Bringing under scrutiny the sentence from Rasselas

> ...while this power [of fancy] is such as we can controul and repress... [see listing above; Wales's emphasis]

Wales, basing herself on the definitions of these verbs in the Dictionary, points out that 'control' "suggests the checking of a wandering, restless entity" whereas 'repress' "suggests the crushing of a powerful force" (29) [my emphasis]. Appealing once again to the Dictionary, she spotlights the difference of signification between the adjectives 'even' and 'unvaried' which occur as a word-pair in Idler 103 (see listing above):

> An even and unvaried tenour of life always hides from our apprehension the approach of its end. [Wales's emphasis]

What 'even' connotes in the given context, she observes, is "a life that has no ups and downs" - which is by no means the same as 'unvaried', whose connotation is "not

diversified" (30). The adjectives 'despotick and dictatorial' exhibit an exceptionally high degree of semantic overlap; they crop up in tandem in Rambler 61:

> A short residence at London entitles a man to...a despotick and dictatorial power of prescribing to the rude multitude... [Wales's emphasis]

Notwithstanding the high degree of semantic overlap, these words are still not 'equivalent terms', as the Dictionary entries make clear: 'despotick' stresses the (essentially political) notion of 'absoluteness of power' while 'dictatorial' bears the more general sense of "authoritative; confident; dogmatical; overbearing" (28). Wales's analysis sufficiently demonstrates, it seems to me, that Johnson's handling of near-synonyms, far from manifesting 'multiplication for emphasis', in fact bears the stamp of juxtaposition for contrast.

The three examples cited in the digest above are, like almost all the others Wales brings forward, illustrative of Johnson's 'structural' method, as I call it. While she does not catch sight of this method qua method, she does notice, with respect to the items she adduces, that Johnson forbears to amplify, leaving it to the reader to work out

for himself the gist of the distinctions gestured to. She discerns in this manner of proceeding an educative motive on his part:

> When words in collocation seem very similar in meaning, it is easy for the reader to assume that "sameness" is what is important, and that multiplication is for emphasis. But Johnson wants us to work harder, to appreciate by our own process of understanding those subtle, yet significant discriminations of meaning of which he himself was aware, and which make up the texture of his mind and work. (31)

I find myself concurring fully with Wales on this point. Defending a position very similar to Wales's, George Fraser argues that "one's attention in reading Johnson...should not be on a core of similar meaning in successive words, but on sharp differences at the edge of that core" (in Wharton 42). But these twentieth-century judgments were anticipated long ago by one of the most insightful of Johnson's early commentators, the Reverend Robert Burrowes, who as far back as 1787, in his "Essay on the Stile of Doctor Samuel Johnson", made the observation that "[t]he distinctions of words esteemed synonimous,

might from his writings be accurately collected" (in Boulton 333).

Whether expressed through the 'structural' method or through the 'explicatory', whether exhibited in the Dictionary or elsewhere in the oeuvre, Johnson's unflagging endeavour to bring into view differences of signification between words 'esteemed synonimous' - that is, his endeavour to point up the non-equivalence and non-interchangeability of terms widely, but erroneously, regarded as equivalent and widely, but mistakenly, used interchangeably - not only bears witness to his 'drive to distinguish' as such, and to its vitality, but also brings into focus the specific linguistic objectives to which this drive ministers, namely, precision and clarity of expression, and distinctness and definiteness of signification; in other words, determinateness of verbal meaning. But in his scheme of things these objectives are less ends in themselves than means to a greater - the "revelation of truth" (Wales 26), in particular, moral truth. For Johnson the goal of revealing and, beyond that, of enshrining truth[61] represented the grand challenge, the

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[61] Mrs Thrale speaks movingly of Johnson's having "a soul...acute to discern the truth, vigorous to embrace, and powerful to retain it..." (in Sherbo 158).

ultimate objective. In the quest to realize it not only his drive to distinguish but all his powers were enlisted.

These remarks bring to a conclusion my discussion of 'Verbal Distinction-making'. The grouping I propose to consider next is 'Rhetorical Distinction-making'.

Rhetorical Distinction-making

This grouping, the largest, by some way, of my seven, contains seven separate categories to which I have affixed the following designations: 'Distinctions by appeal to Analogy', 'Distinction-making within the Frame of the Contrastive Set-piece', 'Distinctions by way of Alternatives', 'Distinctions by way of Denial/Exclusion followed by Affirmation', 'Distinctions by way of Antimetabole (or Chiasmus)', 'Distinguishing the "Truth of the Matter" from Commonly Held Beliefs', 'Distinction-making by way of Enumeration/Hierarchical Ordering'. I propose to examine these categories in the order here stated.

Distinctions by appeal to Analogy

Boswell tells us, at the end of the Life, that "in [Johnson] were united a most logical head with a most

fertile imagination" (1402). As the process lying at the heart of analogical thinking is a metaphor-forming one, originating in that 'leap' of the mind which 'in wondrous wise' connects things apparently quite dissimilar, and as the gift of metaphorical invention has been long esteemed a sign, if not perhaps a proof, of 'fertility of imagination'[62], it follows that this category of 'Distinctions by appeal to Analogy', more conspicuously than any of the others surveyed in the present study, is referable to, and expressive of, Johnson's 'most fertile imagination' - even as his 'philosophical' distinction-making is most conspicuously expressive of his 'logical head'. Moreover, since metaphor is probably the most notable of all the rhetorical tropes, it seemed to me proper that the present category, so obviously configured on the appeal to metaphor, be classified under the head of 'Rhetorical Distinction-making'.

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[62] One can trace the connection between the gift of metaphor and 'fertility of imagination' at least as far back as Aristotle's Poetics:

> It is a great thing, indeed, to make a proper use of these poetical forms [the ones Aristotle has just been discussing]...But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius [frequently identified with 'fertility of imagination', even in the supposedly hyper-rationalistic eighteenth century], since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars. (71)

Donald J Greene describes the function of analogy (for which he takes 'imagery' to be an equivalent term[63]) as follows:

> What the writer who uses imagery is trying to do is to take a notion which is nebulous in the reader's mind (the 'tenor' of the metaphor, in [I A] Richards's terminology) and cause the reader to apprehend it more vividly by associating it with something of which a clear sense impression can be obtained by the mind (the 'vehicle'). ("Johnson and Imagery" in

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[63] Though this is seldom Johnson's own practice - in which connection these remarks by Jean H Hagstrum are germane:

> Our present conception of imagery includes but does not always distinguish two functions of language, that of introducing sensuous concreteness and that of making comparisons. Dr Johnson recognized both but carefully distinguished them. His definition of imagery does not include comparison. (114)

Although for Johnson, continues Hagstrum, imagery "included the sensuous, [it] was...not exclusively confined to it" since "an idea was defined as a 'mental image'". In sum, his notion of 'imagery' probably boiled down to something like "mental pictures of reality, both phenomenal and intellectual" (idem). Hagstrum's conclusion is certainly consistent with the Dictionary's definition of 'imagery' as "such descriptions as force the image of the thing described upon the mind" (sense 4).

In my view Hagstrum is in general correct in maintaining that Johnson's "definition of imagery does not include comparison" (and technically he is of course wholly correct since the Dictionary's definition of 'imagery' demonstrably does not include the notion of comparison). In practice, however, Johnson was not quite so punctilious, and provided the analogy was itself structured on a 'mental picture of reality', he was not above referring to it as an 'image', as he does when summoning to his aid "a beautiful image [my emphasis] in Bacon upon this subject" (of the difference between 'argument' and 'testimony': Life 1283; this item will be found, cited in full, among the examples listed below).

Lascelles 138)

In Greene's view, then, the function of analogy is basically that of sensuous (and, in particular, visual) 'heightening', the object being to invest notions with greater 'vividness' for the reader[64]. But this is in fact a very inadequate characterization of the way in which Johnson handles analogy. Very few of the comparisons he presses into service have as their objective the attainment of mere 'vividness'; though they may well be vivid by the way, they are presidingly enlisted (as I believe the examples cited below make sufficiently clear) with an eye

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[64] Because Greene views Johnson's metaphor-making as 'vivid', 'concrete', strongly 'sensuous' and highly 'visual', he tends to speak of the 'richness' of his imagery: "To Johnson's contemporaries it would have seemed a superfluous undertaking to call attention to the richness of imagery in his use of language" (op. cit. 138). Elsewhere he asserts that "even the reader who knows Johnson only from Boswell must marvel at the visual imagination which makes Johnson's best-known quips so effective" (Editor's Introduction, Samuel Johnson [Twentieth Century Views] 4). At virtually the opposite pole we find Wimsatt taking the view that

> If Johnson's writing may be said to contain imagery, we must understand the term in another sense, that of simply non-literal expression. If it be remembered that not all nonliteral expression, that is, not all metaphor, need be highly sensory, it can be admitted that in some sense Johnson's writing contains imagery. (1941:65)

Can these two critics be talking about one and the same author? What they are in such radical disagreement about does not after all relate to matters merely speculative: there exists a sizable body of evidence that may be appealed to which, if it cannot settle the issue conclusively, can at least furnish some plausible pointers. What the evidence points to, in my view, is that the 'truth of the matter' lies somewhere between the positions adopted by Greene, on the one side, and Wimsatt, on the other: Johnson's handling of metaphor, when seen 'in the round' (at any rate, as far as I am able to do so), is not nearly as sensuously 'vivid' as Greene claims it is; at the same time it is not nearly as non-sensory as Wimsatt would have us believe.

to their explanatory, illustrative or argumentative utility (by 'argumentative' I mean that an analogy is employed in order to clinch a point). In short, Johnson's handling of analogy[65] is informed rather by pragmatic and elucidatory considerations[66] than by considerations of sensuous richness, vividness or poetical 'heightening'.

In his handling of analogy for distinction-making purposes, Johnson has recourse to two identifiably different methods. The one that he uses somewhat more frequently entails first laying out, with varying degrees of fulness, the substance of the distinction, after which[67]

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[65] In the present study I bring under scrutiny only those analogies - a sizable number, to be sure - that are formulated within the context of Johnson's distinction-making praxis. But it is well to bear in mind that the oeuvre contains a probably even larger number of analogies whose formulation is unconnected with distinction-making but arises simply from a perceived need to elucidate, illustrate or clinch a point, of whatever kind. With reference to the analogies framed within the context of Johnson's distinction-making praxis, I may add that their plentifulness is witnessed to not only by the abundance of examples furnished below, but also by the considerable number of exemplifications surfacing in other categories (to which the items in question were allocated owing to their standing out more conspicuously, in my judgment, for some quality other than the analogical) and there glossed as being "simultaneously instances of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy'".

[66] What this also implies is that he is not given to using analogy redundantly or pointlessly; that is, when there is nothing positive to be gained by its deployment. Consider in this connection the following statement from the Life of Pope: "In their similes the greatest writers have sometimes failed: ...when Apollo running after Daphne is likened to a greyhound chasing a hare, there is nothing gained; the ideas of pursuit and flight are too plain to be made plainer [through analogy]" (Lives III 230).

[67] Sometimes, strangely enough, 'before which' - meaning that the analogy precedes the distinction to which it pertains. This appears at first sight to be an odd way of going about things, but it works

he deploys his analogy as an explanatory, illustrative or argumentative aid. So by the time the analogy is enlisted the distinction has already been made. In this case, therefore, the analogy functions essentially as an augmentative device - meaning, that if it were withdrawn, though the distinction would lose something - some of its forcefulness, probably; perhaps some of its clarity - its substance would survive unimpaired and intact. In the alternative method, by contrast, the analogy is no mere supplementary apparatus; it is instead the very warp and woof of the distinction; it is the distinction. Consequently, erasing the analogy would mean erasing the distinction at the same time. So the second method is really more aptly denominated 'Distinction as Analogy' than 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy'. The difference between the two techniques is comparable in a way to that between metaphor and simile: the second works somewhat like metaphor, only one term of the dyad, the 'vehicle' (to recur to Richards's terminology), being given; the first functions more like simile as both 'vehicle' and 'tenor' are equally in the picture. I think, however, that in

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well enough in practice, it seems to me. The instances in which the comparisons precede the subjects they refer to are brought together in a muster of their own in the listings below.

trying to pinpoint the difference between the two techniques I am better served by examples than by comparisons, seeing that I am lucky enough to have at my disposal a pair of items exceptionally well adapted to bringing it out. The reason for this is that while each exemplifies a different method they both happen to be composed of virtually the same analogical 'raw materials'; the effect therefore of playing them off against each other is to throw the differences between the two methods into particularly sharp relief. The first item, it will be observed, plainly presents an instance of 'Distinction by appeal to Analogy' as the analogy is called upon only after the distinction has already been formulated; the second no less plainly exemplifies 'Distinction as Analogy' since the analogical materials brought to bear, though virtually the same as those summoned into service in the first case, in this one, by contrast, constitute the very fabric of the distinction, such that apart from them it has no existence. Here is my pair of examples:

> Books are faithful repositories, which may be a while neglected or forgotten; but when they are opened again, will again impart their instruction: memory, once interrupted, is not to

> be recalled. Written learning is a fixed luminary, which, after the cloud that had hidden it has past away, is again bright in its proper station. Tradition is but a meteor, which, if once it falls, cannot be rekindled. (Journey 113)
>
> If, instead of wandering after the meteors of philosophy which fill the world with splendour for a while, and then sink and are forgotten, the candidates of learning fixed their eyes upon the permanent lustre of moral and religious truth, they would find a more certain direction to happiness. (Rambler 180, V 186)

My prefatory remarks concluded, I propose now to lead my evidence, the presentation of which is ordered on the basis of Johnson's twofold method of handling analogy. I begin with examples illustrative of 'Distinctions as Analogy':

> The author of these memoirs [the Irishman Arthur Murphy] well remembers, that Johnson one day asked him, "Have you observed the difference between your own country impudence and Scottish impudence?" The answer being in the negative:

"Then I will tell you," said Johnson. "The impudence of an Irishman is the impudence of a fly, that buzzes about you...and flutters and teazes you. The impudence of a Scotsman is the impudence of a leech, that fixes and sucks your blood." (in Hill I 427)

Independent and unconnected sentiments flashing upon the mind in quick succession, may, for a time, delight by their novelty, but they differ from systematical reasoning, as single notes from harmony, as glances of lightening [sic] from the radiance of the sun. (Rambler 158, V 78)

A transition from an author's books to his conversation, is too often like an entrance into a large city, after a distant prospect. Remotely, we see nothing but spires of temples, and turrets of palaces, and imagine it the residence of splendor, grandeur, and magnificence; but, when we have passed the gates, we find it perplexed with narrow passages, disgraced with despicable cottages, embarrassed with obstructions, and clouded with

smoke. (Rambler 14, III 79-80)

"The difference between coarse and refined abuse is as the difference between being bruised by a club, and wounded by a poisoned arrow." (Life 1295)

The state of the possessor of humble virtues, to the affecter of great excellencies, is that of a small cottage of stone, to the palace raised with ice by the Empress of Russia; it was for a time splendid and luminous, but the first sunshine melted it to nothing. (Rambler 20, III 115)

When I survey the Plan [of the Dictionary] which I have laid before you, I cannot, my Lord [the reference is to Lord Chesterfield], but confess, that I am frighted at its extent...But I hope, that though I should not complete the conquest, I shall at least discover the coast...and make it easy for some other adventurer to proceed farther... (Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language, in Wilson 138)

Mrs. Kennicot related...a lively saying of Dr. Johnson to Miss Hannah More, who had expressed

a wonder that the poet who had written Paradise Lost should write such poor Sonnets: "Milton, Madam, was a genius that could cut a Colossus from a rock; but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones." (Life 1301)

I told him that Voltaire, in a conversation with me, had distinguished Pope and Dryden thus: "Pope drives a handsome chariot, with a couple of neat trim nags; Dryden a coach, and six stately horses." JOHNSON: Why, Sir, the truth is, they both drive coaches and six; but Dryden's horses are either galloping or stumbling: Pope's go at a steady even trot. (Life 355)

The spangles of wit which [Prior] could afford he knew how to polish; but he wanted the bullion of his master. Butler pours out a negligent profusion, certain of the weight, but careless of the stamp. Prior has comparatively little, but with that little he makes a fine shew. ("Prior", Lives II 205) [This item is simultaneously an instance, in miniature, of the 'Contrastive Set-piece']

They were talking of Burke & Fox: "The first has more bullion", says Mr Johnson, "but the other coins faster." (Mrs Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson 117)

"Pray, Doctor," said a gentleman to him, "is Mr. Thrale a man of conversation, or is he only wise and silent?" "Why, Sir, his conversation does not show the minute hand; but he strikes the hour very correctly." (in Hill II 169)

To neglect at any time preparation for death, is to sleep on our post at a siege, but to omit it in old age, is to sleep at an attack. (Rambler 78, IV 49)

The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabricks of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare. ("Preface" to Shakespeare, in Bronson 270)

...when talked to one day concerning a comparison to be drawn between Shakespeare and Corneille, he said "Corneille is to Shakespeare as a clipped hedge to a forest." (Mrs Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson 12)

[To differentiate Edward Young from Dryden and

> Shakespeare, Johnson recruits the following analogy]: "Young froths, and foams, and bubbles sometimes very vigorously; but we must not compare the noise made by your tea-kettle...with the roaring of the ocean." (Thrale in Sherbo 79)
>
> It has been generally objected to The Wanderer...that the whole performance is not so much a regular fabrick as a heap of shining materials thrown together by accident, which strikes rather with the solemn magnificence of a stupendous ruin than the elegant grandeur of a finished pile. ("Savage", Lives II 365)

The listing which now follows is made up of examples illustrative of 'Distinctions by appeal to Analogy'. I present first a grouping of three items in which the normal conventions of analogical 'protocol' are reversed, such that the analogy precedes the subject it refers to; or, in 'Richards-speak', the 'vehicle' precedes its 'tenor'. The first of these items is a genuinely bravura performance, a tour de force, in which Johnson discriminates the several "qualities requisite to conversation" with reference to the ingredients of a beverage, punch. Despite his strictures

against the Metaphysical poets, he in this piece exhausts the potential of his chosen metaphor (the "bowl of punch") with a completeness, ingenuity and brio quite equal to those of this reprovable "race of authors" ("Cowley", Lives I 22) at their most showy. I shall begin the citation some way before the introduction of the analogy itself as Johnson's initial comments on the the utility of the analogical method are of some interest:

> To illustrate one thing by its resemblance to another has been always the most popular and efficacious art of instruction. There is indeed no other method of teaching that of which any one is ignorant but by means of something already known; and a mind so enlarged by contemplation and enquiry, that it has always many objects within its view, will seldom be long without some near and familiar image thro' which an easy transition may be made to truths more distant and obscure.
>
> Of the parallels which have been drawn by wit and curiosity, some are literal and real, as between poetry and painting...
>
> Other parallels are fortuitous and

fanciful, yet these have sometimes been extended to many particulars of resemblance by a lucky concurrence of diligence and chance. ...

Of this [latter kind of parallel] is a curious speculation frequently indulged by a philosopher of my acquaintance, who had discovered that the qualities requisite to conversation are very exactly represented by a bowl of punch.

Punch, says this profound investigator, is a liquor compounded of spirit and acid juices, sugar and water. The spirit volatile and fiery, is the proper emblem of vivacity and wit, the acidity of the lemon will very aptly figure pungency of raillery, and acrimony of censure; sugar is the natural representative of luscious adulation and gentle complaisance; and water is the proper hieroglyphick of easy prattle, innocent and tasteless.

Spirit alone is too powerful for use. It will produce madness rather than merriment; and instead of quenching thirst will inflame the blood. Thus wit too copiously poured out

agitates the hearer with emotions rather violent than pleasing; every one shrinks from the force of its oppression...

The acid juices give this genial liquor all its power of stimulating the palate. Conversation would become dull and vapid, if negligence were not sometimes roused, and sluggishness quickened, by due severity of reprehension. But acids unmixt will distort the face and torture the palate; and he that has no other qualities than penetration and asperity...will soon be dreaded, hated, and avoided.

The taste of sugar is generally pleasing, but it cannot long be eaten by itself. Thus meekness and courtesy will always recommend the first address, but soon pall and nauseate, unless they are associated with more spritely qualities. ...

Water is the universal vehicle by which are conveyed the particles necessary to sustenance and growth, by which thirst is quenched, and all the wants of life and nature are supplied. Thus

all the business of the world is transacted by artless and easy talk, neither sublimed by fancy, nor discoloured by affectation... Water is the only ingredient of punch which can be used alone, and with which man is content till fancy has framed an artificial want. ...

He only will please long, who, by tempering the acid of satire with the sugar of civility, and allaying the heat of wit with the frigidity of humble chat, can make the true punch of conversation... (Idler 34, 106-108)

Cunning differs from wisdom as twilight from open day. He that walks in the sunshine goes boldly forward by the nearest way; he sees that where the path is streight and even he may proceed in security, and where it is rough and crooked he easily complies with the turns and avoids the obstructions. But the traveller in the dusk fears more as he sees less; he...suspects that he is never safe, tries every step before he fixes his foot, and shrinks at every noise... Wisdom comprehends at once the end and the means, estimates easiness or

> difficulty, and is cautious or confident in due proportion. Cunning discovers little at a time, and has no other means of certainty than multiplication of stratagems and superfluity of suspicion. The man of cunning always considers that he can never be too safe, and therefore always keeps himself enveloped in a mist, impenetrable, as he hopes, to the eye of rivalry or curiosity[68]. (Idler 92, 284-85)
>
> ...as the industry of observation has divided the most miscellaneous and confused assemblages into proper classes, and ranged the insects of the summer, that torment us with their drones or stings, by their several tribes; the persecutors of merit...may likewise be commodiously distinguished into Roarers, Whisperers, and Moderators. (Rambler 144, V 5)

In the examples now to be presented, the usual order of analogical 'protocol' is observed; that is to say, the distinction is laid out first, followed by the appeal to

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[68] The device of the personified abstraction ('personification'), the use of which is so conspicuous in this passage, is a recurrent, though not, as has been sometimes alleged, habitual feature of Johnson's discourse (of his written discourse, that is; it rarely if ever figures in his spoken). But in his recourse to personification, Johnson was simply following the practice of the age.

analogy:

> No passage in [Addison's heroic poem] The Campaign has been more often mentioned than the simile of the Angel... Let it be first enquired whether it be a simile. A poetical simile is the discovery of likeness between two actions in their general nature dissimilar, or of causes terminating by different operations in some resemblance of effect. But the mention of another like consequence from a like cause, or of a like performance by a like agency, is not a simile, but an exemplification. ...A simile may be compared to lines converging at a point and is more excellent as the lines approach from greater distance: an exemplification may be considered as two parallel lines which run on together without approximation, never far separated, and never joined. ("Addison", Lives II 129-130)
>
> So different are the colours of life...that the conversation of the old and young ends generally with contempt or pity on either side... Thus one generation is always the scorn and wonder of the

other, and the notions of the old and young are like liquors of different gravity and texture which never can unite. (Rambler 69, III 365)

If praise be...a blessing which no man can promise himself from the most conspicuous merit...how faint must be the hope of gaining it, when the uncertainty is multiplied by the weakness of the pretensions! He that persues fame with just claims, trusts his happiness to the winds; but he that endeavours after it, by false merit, has to fear, not only the violence of the storm, but the leaks of his vessel. (Rambler 20, III 114)

"Sir", (continued [Johnson]), "there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and there is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson. Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood by a more superficial observer than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart. ...There [is] as great a difference between them

[Richardson and Fielding] as between a man who [knows] how a watch [is] made, and a man who [can] tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate." This was a short and figurative state of his distincton between drawing characters of nature and characters only of manners. (Life 389) [emphasis in original]

That there is something in advice very useful and salutary, seems to be equally confessed on all hands; since even those that reject it, allow for the most part that rejection to be wrong, but charge the fault upon the unskilful manner in which it is given; they admit the efficacy of the medicine, but abhor the nauseousness of the vehicle. (Adventurer 74, II 395)

I talked of the recent expulsion of six students from the University of Oxford, who were methodists, and would not desist from publickly praying and exhorting. JOHNSON: Sir, that expulsion was extremely just and proper. What have they to do at an University who are not willing to be taught, but will presume to teach?

...BOSWELL: But, was it not hard, Sir, to expel them, for I am told they were good beings? JOHNSON: Sir, I believe they might be good beings; but they were not fit to be in the University of Oxford. A cow is a very good animal in the field; but we turn her out of a garden. (Life 490)

[Bishop] PERCY: He [Thomas Pennant, author of A Tour in Scotland (1771)] pretends to give the natural history of Northumberland, and yet takes no notice of the immense number of trees planted there of late. JOHNSON: That, Sir, has nothing to do with the natural history; that is civil history. A man who gives the natural history of the oak, is not to tell how many oaks have been planted in this place or that. A man who gives the natural history of the cow, is not to tell how many cows are milked at Islington. The animal is the same, whether milked in the Park or at Islington. (Life 932) [emphasis in original]

Sir James Johnston happened to say, that he paid no regard to the arguments of counsel at the bar

of the House of Commons, because they were paid for speaking. JOHNSON: Nay, Sir, argument is argument. You cannot help paying regard to their arguments, if they are good. If it were testimony, you might disregard it, if you knew that it were purchased. There is a beautiful image in Bacon upon this subject: testimony is like an arrow shot from a long bow; the force of it depends on the strength of the hand that draws it. Argument is like an arrow from a cross-bow, which has equal force though shot by a child. (Life 1283)

Sir Joshua Reynolds praised Mudge's Sermons. JOHNSON: Mudge's Sermons are good, but not practical. He grasps more sense than he can hold; he takes more corn than he can make into meal; he opens a wide prospect, but it is so distant, it is indistinct. (Life 1140)

...the conversation having turned upon Edwards's book [Canons of Criticism], the gentleman praised it much, and Johnson allowed its merit. But when they went farther, and appeared to put that authour upon a level with Warburton, "Nay,

(said Johnson), he has given him some smart hits to be sure; but there is no proportion between the two men; they must not be named together. A fly, Sir, may sting a stately horse and make him wince; but one is but an insect, and the other is a horse still." (Life 186 [footnote 2])

Of his fellow-collegian, the celebrated Mr George Whitefield [the Methodist revivalist preacher], he said, "Whitefield never drew as much attention as a mountebank does; he did not draw attention by doing better than others, but by doing what was strange. Were Astley to preach a sermon standing upon his head on a horse's back, he would collect a multitude to hear him; but no wise man would say he had made a better sermon for that". (Life 1037)

There is...a common stock of images, a settled mode of arrangement, and a beaten track of transition, which all authors suppose themselves at liberty to use... So...the author who imitates his predecessors only, by furnishing himself with thoughts and elegancies out of the

> same general magazine of literature, can with little more propriety be reproached as a plagiary, than the architect can be censured as a mean copier of Angelo or Wren, because he digs his marble from the same quarry, squares his stones by the same art, and unites them in columns of the same orders. (Rambler 143, IV 394-95)

That the evidence of Johnson's use of analogy within the context of distinction-making is so copious (though for all that, as I indicated earlier, probably less copious than the evidence of his use of it in contexts unconnected with distinction-making) proves one thing at least, if it proves nothing else: it proves how wrongheaded are the allegations, heard even in our own day, of his 'dry intellectualism', his 'arid abstractness'. As an example of this viewpoint Greene cites a judgment pronounced in the 1950s by a Canadian academic "of some prominence": "More than half-deaf, and more than half-blind, [Johnson's] response [was] limited almost entirely to the conceptual aspects of poetry" (Editor's Introduction, Samuel Johnson: A Collection of Critical Essays 4). Greene uses the epithet "benighted" to characterize this outlook - not too

strong a term in my opinion. But even Wimsatt's much better informed, and more temperately phrased comments regarding Johnson's proneness to 'abstraction'[69] also strike me as on the whole ill-aimed when seen in the light

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[69] For example:

> Johnson's terms tend to be non-sensory, his meaning to be general and abstract. (1941:65)
>
> We may call Hazlitt's words sensory and specific, Johnson's non-sensory and general. (ibid. 55)
>
> ...the two traits of generalization and abstraction lead Johnson to a third...the use of general or abstract words which have a scientific or philosophic flavor. (ibid. 59)

Arguing along the same lines, Sherburn and Bond state that "[b]y habit [Johnson] writes in abstract terms, and such terms tend to seem Latin even when they are not" (1003).

The debate about the 'abstractness', or otherwise, of Johnson's discourse is usefully viewed within the frame of Greene's submission that

> there has...existed a 'double tradition' of Johnson the writer - two quite contradictory ways of reading the words on a Johnsonian page. The one sees it as exuberant with concrete and vivid imagery; the other finds only a drear waste of 'abstraction' and inflated, pompous verbosity. The one sees Johnson the critic as highly concerned to promote the use of effective imagery as an indispensable quality of the highest poetry; the other finds him suspicious, even fearful of it. (in Lascelles 156)

Greene is here pitting polar positions against each other, to the exclusion of a middle ground which is where I believe the 'truth of the matter' really lies (as I have indicated in an earlier footnote). It seems to me that F R Leavis stakes out a position more or less on the middle ground which Greene disregards: criticizing Joseph Wood Krutch for claiming that "Johnson did not merely write abstractly; he thought abstractly", Leavis for his part contends that

> To call Johnson's style 'abstract' is misleading if you don't go on at once to explain that abstractness here doesn't exclude concreteness, or (since these words, at any rate as used

by literary critics, are not very determinate in force) to insist that the style is remarkable for body. It is a generalizing style; its extraordinary weight is a generalizing weight; and the literary critic should be occupied with analysing this, and with explaining how Johnson's generalities come to be so different in effect from ordinary abstractness. ...Johnson's abstractions and generalities are not mere empty explicitnesses substituting for the concrete; they focus a wide range of profoundly representative experience - experience felt by the reader as movingly present. (101-102)

of the evidence marshalled above. Most particularly when they are set against Johnson's conversational use of analogy do complaints about his 'dryness', 'abstractness' or 'pomposity' strike me as wrongheaded and misapplied. For the items in the listings above which are drawn from the conversational record reveal a handling of analogy remarkable in my view for its vigorous 'down-to-earthness' (consider how large a number of his analogies are drawn from the realm of everyday experience), verve and 'edge' (and also for its ability to convey something of the flavour of his "bow-wow way" (Life 599)). The handling of analogy in the writings, though admirable, is by comparison less piquant[70], more studiedly wrought; nor does it bear to anything like the same degree the impress of Johnson's inimitable personality. But from an activity which, compared to conversation, is so much more deliberate, more premeditated, it would be unreasonable to expect anything very different to ensue. Proceeding now with my analysis, the category I want to examine next is 'Distinction-making within the Frame of the Contrastive Set-piece'.

Distinction-making within the Frame of the Contrastive Set-

[70] The tour de force of the 'bowl of punch' in Idler 34 (cited above) is to my mind the exception that proves the rule.

piece

In employing the contrastive set-piece as an instrument of critical evaluation, Johnson inserts himself into a rhetorical tradition of long standing; his use of this form looks back to "a long line of precedents, ranging from Longinus's comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero, through Dryden's comparison of Shakespeare and Jonson, to Pope's comparison of Homer and Virgil in his preface to the Iliad" (Maner 125). Maner however omits to mention the most notable of all Johnson's precedents, Plutarch's Parallel Lives, composed in all likelihood sometime between 100 and 116 (Hamilton xv, xxxvii). This work, certainly well known to Johnson (Life 1365), as it was to all educated Europeans of his day, bears the name it does because of the singular, though not unique (Russell (1972) 109) principle of biographical pairing upon which it is constructed: the biography of a distinguished Greek is paired with that of a Roman counterpart. At the end of each pair of biographies (save four, out of a total of twenty-three), its subjects are set over against each other in a formal, rhetorically-conditioned[71] comparison called

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[71] "They [the formal comparisons] are, as it were, model answers for a rhetorical exercise: you have heard the two stories, what points of similarity and difference can you see? Such things were of course practised in the schools [of rhetoric]. Quintilian (2.4.21) gives two

the synkrisis which, as Hamilton notes, "serves especially to set out the differences between the heroes" (xxxiv; emphasis in original). Johnson's practice is modelled in this particular on the Plutarchian formula: his contrastive set-pieces aim to point up differences rather than similarities.

Dryden's comparison of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson is singled out by Maner as another of Johnson's precedents. This is no doubt the case, but to point to just this comparison as a probable influence upon Johnson's practice is to slight Dryden who, while he framed comparisons between persons (invariably writers) on the Plutarchian model, though in nowhere near so systematic a fashion, also travelled some distance beyond Plutarch in applying the contrastive method to other subjects as well. Thus we find him setting up dialectical contrasts between genres (Comedy and Farce) or between mental faculties (Wit and Fancy)[72].

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advanced exercises which can be used to stimulate progress when simple narratio has been mastered. One consists of encomium and invective... The other exercise is comparison - 'Which is the better man and which the worse?' This gives double the amount of material to handle and deals not only with the nature of virtues and vices but with the degree (modus) in which they are present. Plutarch's sunkriseis are specimens of this kind of work" (Russell (1972) 110). Similarly, though in a somewhat looser sense, Johnson's contrastive set-pieces are specimens of Plutarchian synkrisis. It is for this reason that it seemed to me proper to locate the present category under the head of 'Rhetorical Distinction-making'.

[72] A useful sampling of Dryden's contrastive pieces is given in The Oxford Anthology of English Literature, vol. 1 (Ed. Kermode, F et

As much as Johnson follows Plutarch's lead in constructing his set-pieces on the principle of bringing differences to the fore, so he follows Dryden's as regards range of subject matter. Certainly he composes set-pieces in which persons (invariably, as with Dryden, these are authors) and their relative merits and demerits form the subject of the juxtaposition-for-contrast, but he composes a greater number which point up differences of other kinds: between, for example, Shakespeare's comic style and his tragic, or between works of the same genre (even the same theme) written by different authors (Pope's Ode for St Cecilia's Day vs. Dryden's), or between conditions of life (old age vs. youth), or political temperaments (Tory vs. Whig), or journalistic leanings (Monthly reviewers vs. Critical reviewers), or human acquirements (Wit vs. Learning), or objects of human aspiration (Power vs. Wealth).

Johnson's most extended use of the contrastive set-

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al.), 1660-68. In the headnote prefatory to this miscellany, Dryden's predilection for the contrastive method is referred to the attraction exerted upon his particular cast of mind by the "balancing of contraries and opposites" (1660). It is very probable that the same factor presidingly accounts for Johnson's predilection, no less marked than Dryden's, for this same method. Implicit in this supposition is the hypothesis that, in one area at least, the build of Johnson's mind differed little from that of Dryden's. However that may be, it is not difficult to see that to a mind like Johnson's the prospect of 'balancing contraries and opposites' could not but have been congenial, not only because 'contraries and opposites' are the product of distinction-making but because the balancing of them has everything to do with those shapely symmetries of antithetical equipoise and parallel construction to which he was so conspicuously drawn.

piece as a vehicle of critical evaluation is the lengthy synkrisis he frames in the Life of Pope in which this poet and Dryden are set up as foils to each other. In his management of the comparison Johnson's aim is not just to differentiate them but to make the traits on the basis of which they are differentiated bring into focus - and into the sharpest focus at that - what is essential and distinctive in the poetical style and manner of each. This is no easy aim; it involves turning a far from simple trick. Johnson is however equal to the challenge, not only 'turning his trick' but doing so with great address[73]. His success in this department is, it seems to me, what mainly accounts for the Pope/Dryden set-piece standing out not only as one of the finest things in the Life of Pope (which is full of fine things), but as one of the finest in the Lives as a whole. There are other reasons as well for its distinction - Johnson's eloquence, breadth of vision, and critical incisiveness, the subtlety and deftness of his expository procedures (analysed in some detail by Maner,

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[73] He is helped, to be sure, by his choice of authors. Relatively few pairings of writers lend themselves to the kind of differentiation that also serves to bring out what is essential and distinctive in the work of each. As these pairings are few, so they tend to be standardized: apart from Pope and Dryden, one thinks, among others (relatively few others), of Virgil and Homer, Horace and Juvenal, Shakespeare and Jonson, Corneille and Racine, Voltaire and Rousseau, Tolstoy and Dostoievsky.

124-26), and his telling, at times inspired, use of analogy. In short, Johnson pulls off a tour de force without the least appearance of labour or strain. In the citation which follows the greater part of the comparison is given:

> ...Dryden never desired to apply all the judgement that he had. He wrote, and professed to write, merely for the people; and when he pleased others, he contented himself. He spent no time in struggles to rouse latent powers; he never attempted to make that better which was already good, nor often to mend what he must have known to be faulty. ...
>
> Pope was not content to satisfy; he desired to excel, and therefore always endeavoured to do his best: he did not court the candour, but dared the judgement of his reader, and, expecting no indulgence from others, he shewed none to himself. He examined lines and words with minute and punctilious observation, and retouched every part with indefatigable diligence, till he had left nothing to be forgiven. ...

...Pope had perhaps the judgement of Dryden; but Dryden certainly wanted the diligence of Pope.

In acquired knowledge the superiority must be allowed to Dryden, whose education was more scholastick... His mind has a larger range, and he collects his images and illustrations from a more extensive circumference of science. Dryden knew more of man in his general nature, and Pope in his local manners. The notions of Dryden were formed by comprehensive speculation, and those of Pope by minute attention. There is more dignity in the knowledge of Dryden, and more certainty in that of Pope.

...The style of Dryden is capricious and varied, that of Pope is cautious and uniform; Dryden obeys the motions of his own mind, Pope constrains his mind to his own rules of composition. Dryden is sometimes vehement and rapid; Pope is always smooth, uniform, and gentle. Dryden's page is a natural field, rising into inequalities, and diversified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation; Pope's is a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe, and

levelled by the roller.

Of genius, that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgement is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies and animates - the superiority must, with some hesitation, be allowed to Dryden. It is not to be inferred that of this poetical vigour Pope had only a little, because Dryden had more, for every other writer since Milton must give place to Pope; and even of Dryden it must be said that if he has brighter paragraphs, he has not better poems. Dryden's performances were always hasty...he composed without consideration, and published without correction...The dilatory caution of Pope enabled him to condense his sentiments, to multiply his images, and to accumulate all that study might produce, or chance might supply. If the flights of Dryden therefore are higher, Pope continues longer on the wing. If of Dryden's fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope's the heat is more regular and constant. Dryden often surpasses expectation, and Pope never falls

below it. Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, and Pope with perpetual delight. ("Pope", Lives III 220-23)

For the Teutonick etymologies, I am commonly indebted to Junius and Skinner... Of these...Junius appears to have excelled in extent of learning, and Skinner in rectitude of understanding. Junius was accurately skilled in all the northern languages, Skinner probably examined the ancient and remoter dialects only by occasional inspection into dictionaries; but the learning of Junius is often of no other use than to show him a track by which he may deviate from his purpose, to which Skinner always presses forward by the shortest way. Skinner is often ignorant, but never ridiculous: Junius is always full of knowledge; but his variety distracts his judgment, and his learning is very frequently disgraced by his absurdities. ("Preface" to the Dictionary, in Bronson 240) [emphasis in original]

The different manner and effect with which critical knowledge may be conveyed was perhaps

> never more clearly exemplified than in the performances of Rymer and Dryden. It was said of a dispute between two mathematicians...that "it was more eligible to go wrong with one than right with the other." A tendency of the same kind every mind must feel at the perusal of Dryden's prefaces and Rymer's discourses. With Dryden we are wandering in quest of Truth, whom we find, if we find her at all, drest in the graces of elegance; and if we miss her, the labour of the pursuit rewards itself: we are led only through fragrance and flowers. Rymer, without taking a nearer, takes a rougher way; every step is to be made through thorns and brambles, and Truth, if we meet her, appears repulsive by her mien and ungraceful by her habit. Dryden's criticism has the majesty of a queen; Rymer's has the ferocity of a tyrant. ("Dryden", Lives I 412-13)

Johnson's use of the set-piece in the items which follow bears upon a range of subjects other than authors or critics. In the first passage cited, where Wit and Learning are played off against each other, these two

adversaries seem to function as personified abstractions; in fact, they are mythological incarnations, being the central characters of a mythological fable expressly invented by Johnson to supply the matter of Rambler 22:

> It was observable, that at the beginning of every debate, the advantage was on the side of Wit [the offspring of Apollo by Euphrosyne]; and that, at the first sallies, the whole assembly sparkled, according to Homer's expression, with unextinguishable merriment. But Learning [the offspring of Apollo by Sophia] would reserve her strength till the burst of applause was over... She then attempted her defence, and, by comparing one part of her antagonist's objections with another, commonly made him confute himself... The audience began gradually to lay aside their prepossessions, and rose, at last, with great veneration for Learning, but with greater kindness for Wit.
>
> Their conduct was, whenever they desired to recommend themselves to distinction, entirely opposite. Wit was daring and adventurous; Learning cautious and deliberate. Wit thought

nothing reproachful but dulness; Learning was afraid of no imputation, but that of error. Wit answered before he understood, lest his quickness of apprehension should be questioned; Learning paused, where there was no difficulty, lest any insidious sophism should lie undiscovered. Wit perplexed every debate by rapidity and confusion; Learning tired the hearers with endless distinctions, and prolonged the discussion without advantage, by proving that which never was denied. Wit, in hopes of shining, would venture to produce what he had not considered, and often succeeded beyond his own expectation, by following the train of a lucky thought; Learning would reject every new notion, for fear of being intangled in consequences which she could not foresee...

Both had prejudices, which in some degree hindered their progress towards perfection, and left them open to attacks. Novelty was the darling of Wit, and antiquity of Learning. To Wit, all that was new was specious; to Learning, whatever was antient, was venerable. Wit,

however, seldom failed to divert those whom he could not convince, and to convince was not often his ambition; Learning always supported her opinion with so many collateral truths, that, when the cause was decided against her, her arguments were remembered with admiration.

Nothing was more common, on either side, than to quit their proper characters, and to hope for a compleat conquest by the use of the weapons which had been employed against them. Wit would sometimes labour a syllogism, and Learning distort her features with a jest; but they always suffered by the experiment... The seriousness of Wit was without dignity, and the merriment of Learning without vivacity. (III 122-23) [At the end of the fable, by the way, Wit and Learning are reconciled: they "were so endeared to each other, that they lived afterwards in perpetual concord. Wit persuaded Learning to converse with the Graces, and Learning engaged Wit in the service of the Virtues" (ibid. 125)]

"The opinions of children and parents [declares

Nekayah], of the young and the old, are naturally opposite, by the contrary effects of hope and despondence, of expectation and experience...

"Few parents act in such a manner as much to enforce their maxims by the credit of their lives. The old man trusts wholly to slow contrivance and gradual progression: the youth expects to force his way by genius, vigour, and precipitance. The old man pays regard to riches, and the youth reverences virtue. The old man deifies prudence: the youth commits himself to magnanimity and chance. The young man, who intends no ill, believes that none is intended, and therefore acts with openness and candour: but his father, having suffered the injuries of fraud, is impelled to suspect, and too often allured to practise it. Age looks with anger on the temerity of youth, and youth with contempt on the scrupulosity of age. Thus parents and children, for the greatest part, live on to love less and less..." (Rasellas, in Bronson 658)

When the power of birth and station ceases, no hope remains but from the prevalence [= ascendancy] of money. Power and wealth supply the place of each other. Power confers the ability of gratifying our desire without the consent of others. Wealth enables us to obtain the consent of others to our gratification. Power, simply considered, whatever it confers on one, must take from another. Wealth enables its owner to give to others, by taking only from himself. Power pleases the violent and proud: wealth delights the placid and the timorous. Youth therefore flies at power, and age grovels after riches. (Journey 100-101)

A wise Tory and a wise Whig, I believe, will agree. Their principles are the same, though their modes of thinking are different. A high Tory makes government unintelligible: it is lost in the clouds. A violent Whig makes it impracticable: he is for allowing so much liberty to every man, that there is not power enough to govern any man. The prejudice of the Tory is for establishment; the prejudice of the

Whig is for innovation. A Tory does not wish to give more real power to Government; but that Government should have more reverence. Then they differ as to the Church. The Tory is not for giving more legal power to the Clergy, but wishes they should have a considerable influence, founded on the opinion of mankind; the Whig is for limiting and watching them with a narrow jealousy. (Life 1154-55) [It is well to remember that this fully-formed, elaborately counterpointed disquisition belongs to the spoken record, not the written! Boswell is quite explicit on this point. In fact, he was, as he tells us, so impressed with Johnson's eloquence the first time round that he asked him to repeat what he had said in order to make a verbatim transcript of it (v. Appendix A and Life 1154). This no doubt is the reason for the exceptional 'all-of-a-pieceness' of the utterance as recorded. What it very clearly demonstrates is Johnson's gift for speaking, 'at the drop of a hat', just as correctly and as plangently as he wrote. This is a talent I have

already adverted to, relying for support on the testimony of Johnson's contemporaries. One of them, the painter Ozias Humphrey, remarked that everything he said was "as correct as a second edition" (in Hill II 401). We see the proof of that in this passage]

Talking of the Reviews [the Monthly Review and the Critical Review], Johnson said..."The Monthly Reviewers...are not Deists; but they are Christians with as little christianity as may be; and are for pulling down all establishments. The Critical Reviewers are for supporting the constitution, both in church and state. The Critical Reviewers, I believe, often review without reading the books through; but lay hold of a topic, and write chiefly from their minds. The Monthly Reviewers are duller men, and are glad to read the books through." (Life 740)

The Ode for St. Cecilia's Day was undertaken at the desire of Steele: in this the author is generally confessed to have miscarried, yet he miscarried only as compared with Dryden; for he has far outgone other competitors. Dryden's

plan is better chosen; history will always take stronger hold of the attention than fable: the passions excited by Dryden are the pleasures and pains of real life, the scene of Pope is laid in imaginary existence. Pope is read with calm acquiescence, Dryden with turbulent delight; Pope hangs upon the ear, and Dryden finds the passes of the mind. ("Pope", Lives III 226-27)

Shakespeare engaged in dramatick poetry with the world open before him; the rules of the ancients were yet known to few; the publick judgment was unformed... He therefore indulged his natural disposition, and his disposition, as Rhymer has remarked, led him to comedy. In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but in his comick scenes, he seems to produce without labour, what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic, but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragick scenes there is always something

> wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy for the greater part by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct. ("Preface" to Shakespeare, in Bronson 269) [emphasis in original]

Surveying with a general gaze Johnson's handling of the contrastive set-piece, as instanced in the passages assembled above, I am led to proffer three summarizing observations by way of concluding comment.

First: Johnson's dialectical back-and-forth movement between the contraries on which the set-pieces are structured exemplifies in a clear-cut and striking fashion what Bate calls the "active balance of his thought" (1955:171), a trait that contributes decisively to his prose style being "the most symmetrical as well as one of the most vigorous...in English" (idem). "The union of vigor and order", concludes Bate, "is significant" (ibid. 172). This is a remark that may with particular aptness be applied to Johnson's praxis in the set-pieces: the play between, and balancing of, contraries, which are its hall-marks, are well characterized as a 'union of vigor and

order'.

Second (this point and the next shift the spotlight on to the issue of Johnson's 'vigour'): his handling of the contrastive set-piece brings into prominence two significant sources of that vigour of style and expression so widely noted, and commended, both by his contemporaries and by succeeding generations of readers and critics. One such source which the set-pieces highlight is the short, punchy sentence. This kind of formation, so obviously helpful to energetic expression, tends to reach a peak of concentration and forcefulness when Johnson presses forward into the thick of his dialectical 'to-ing and fro-ing' ("Wit was daring and adventurous; Learning cautious and deliberate. Wit thought nothing reproachful but dulness; Learning was afraid of no imputation, but that of error" - and so forth). The forceful brevity of the greater number of the sentences in the set-pieces stands out all the more emphatically when it is contrasted with the elaborate, stately, syntactically complex style that he is apt on occasion to adopt elsewhere, particularly in the Ramblers. In the Hebrides Journal, Boswell records his criticism of Carte's Life of the Duke of Ormond: "The matter is diffused in too many words; there is no

animation, no compression, no vigour" (340). It is reasonable to infer from this judgment that the attributes of animation, compression and vigour were ones Johnson prized, that they ranked high on his scale of stylistic desiderata; these are precisely the attributes that distinguish most of the sentences in the contrastive set-pieces.

Third: the other source of 'vigour' (and of brevity too, for that matter) which Johnson's practice in the set-pieces serves to highlight is the use of verbs in the active voice. It is too little realized how much of our sense of a text's 'energy' and 'momentum' is traceable to the use it makes of active constructions. It seems to me that the contrastive set-pieces are signally well adapted to enforcing this realization as, on the one hand, they are a very hive of active constructions (it would not be going too far, in my judgment, to categorize them as a <u>locus classicus</u> demonstrating the effective utilization of the active voice) while, on the other, they exhibit a particularly high 'energy quotient' (if I may call it that). It is therefore difficult to escape the conclusion that between these phenomena there is very likely to exist a significant degree of correlation. This is a conclusion

to which I believe a careful examination of the passages cited above will not fail to lend support.

If the set-pieces highlight the way in which the use of the active voice facilitates an energetic, 'hard-driving' style, they also point up, through those few instances in which the passive voice is employed, how this construction tends to place a curb upon 'vigour' and impetus. Consider, for example, how the spring and the forward thrust released by the active constructions and compressed, forceful periods of

> Dryden obeys the motions of his own mind, Pope constrains his mind to his own rules of composition. Dryden is sometimes vehement and rapid; Pope is always smooth, uniform, and gentle. ...

are checked, at the beginning of the paragraph immediately following, by

> Of genius, that power which constitutes a poet...that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates - the superiority must, with some hesitation, be allowed to Dryden.

What happens here, as I see it (and, more to the point, as I experienced it, in terms of my response to the

'change of gear' at this juncture), is that the spirited forward movement of the prose simply fizzles out as it runs on to the 'sandbank' of the passive construction (and of the latinate inversion in which it is embedded). The power of the passive voice to place a curb upon energetic expression is not to be underestimated. It is my subjective impression that Johnson is in general rather sparing of passive constructions, and if this be so I can only speculate that the reason for it lay in an awareness of the built-in tendency of the passive voice to hinder forceful expression - and on forceful expression, as we know, he set a very high value. But even supposing my subjective impression is wrong and that in general he is not sparing of passive constructions, the fact remains that in the contrastive set-pieces he is. Continuing my analysis, I propose now to examine the category bearing the title 'Distinctions by way of Alternatives'.

Distinctions by way of Alternatives

In this category Johnson's distinction-making bent is articulated through the positing of alternatives - alternative possibilities, probabilities, and explanations; alternatives with respect to human desires and conditions

of life. In all cases the alternatives presented are cast in the form of constructions based on correlative conjunctions. The most frequently encountered of these is the formation 'either X or Y'; its negative counterpart 'neither X nor Y' also crops up fairly often. Less frequently found is the construction 'whether X or Y' which Johnson enlists when he wishes to signal the conjectural or perhaps the doubtful nature of the alternatives posited. Rarest of all is the formation - a plainly legalistic one - 'If W...let X...; if Y...let Z...'. The grammatical and structural distinctiveness of these formations, together with their uniformly sharing the attribute of proposing alternatives, provided a clear basis for constituting them as an independent category in their own right. A further reason for so doing, also referable to a distinctive trait uniformly shared, is that in these constructions the alternatives presented are always characterized by parity of status, by contrast, say, with the construction 'rather X than Y'[74] which, while also presenting alternatives,

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[74] That this construction is treated under the head of 'Distinctions of Ideas' rather than here, under 'Rhetorical Distinction-making', is the consequence of my entirely subjective feeling that it is somehow less rhetorically clear-cut than the 'either...or', 'neither...nor' or 'whether...or' formations. These latter, striking me as a good deal more antithetically complexioned than the 'rather X than Y' configuration and, for that reason, as more rhetorically explicit, seemed accordingly to assert, as 'rather X than Y' did not, an obvious and natural claim to inclusion under the head

simultaneously signals a preference for one over the other.

In the ordering of my evidence I shall adopt the following arrangement: to begin with I shall offer instances of the 'either X or Y' construction, then examples of its negative counterpart, 'neither X nor Y', thereafter examples of the formation 'whether X or Y', and finally an instance of the construction 'If W...let X...; if Y...let Z...'.

> The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths, by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions...
>
> Yet there is a certain race of men [the critics], that either imagine it their duty, or make it their amusement, to hinder the reception of every work of learning or genius... (Rambler 3, III 14-15)
>
> No man ever yet became great by imitation. Whatever hopes for the veneration of mankind

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of 'Rhetorical Distinction-making'.

must have invention in the design or the execution; either the effect must itself be new, or the means by which it is produced. Either truths hitherto unknown must be discovered, or those which are already known enforced by stronger evidence... (Rambler 154, V 59)

...every error in human conduct must arise from ignorance in ourselves, either perpetual or temporary; and happen either because we do not know what is best and fittest, or because our knowledge is at the time of action not present to the mind. (Rambler 24, III 131)

[A man's] desire of pleasing those whose favour he has weakly made necessary to himself, will not suffer him always to consider how little he is qualified for the work imposed. Either his vanity will tempt him to conceal his deficiencies, or that cowardice, which always encroaches fast upon such as spend their lives in the company of persons higher than themselves, will not leave him resolution to assert the liberty of choice. (Rambler 21, III 119)

This practice [the recital of genealogies by Highland bards] has never subsisted within time of memory, nor was much credit due to such rehearsers, who might obtrude fictitious pedigrees, either to please their masters, or to hide the deficiency of their own memories. (Journey 114)

No man yet was ever wicked without secret discontent, and according to the different degrees of remaining virtue, or unextinguished reason, he either endeavours to reform himself, or corrupt others; either to regain the station which he has quitted, or prevail on others to imitate his defection. (Rambler 76, IV 35)

It seems certain, that either a man must believe that virtue will make him happy, and resolve therefore to be virtuous, or think that he may be happy without virtue, and therefore cast off all care but for his present interest. (Rambler 70, IV 4)

It is, indeed, the fate of controvertists...to be soon laid aside and slighted. Either the question is decided, and there is no more place

for doubt and opposition; or mankind despair of understanding it, and...content themselves with quiet ignorance... (Rambler 106, IV 203)

...But many...there are, either of greater resolution or more credulity, who in earnest try the state [of seclusion] which they have been taught to think thus secure from cares and dangers; and retire to privacy, either that they may improve their happiness, increase their knowledge, or exalt their virtue. (Adventurer 126, II 472)

...so, perhaps, to each individual of the human species, nature has ordained the same quantity of wakefulness and sleep; though divided by some into a total quiescence and vigorous exertion of their faculties, and blended by others in a kind of twilight of existence...in which they either think without action, or act without thought. (Adventurer 39, II 348) [The final segment of this item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinctions by way of Antimetabole']

On Monday, May 26, I found him at tea...I asked if there would be any speakers in Parliament, if

there were no places to be obtained. JOHNSON: Yes, Sir. Why do you speak here? Either to instruct and entertain, which is a benevolent motive; or for distinction, which is a selfish motive. (Life 1236-37)

...nobody suffered more from pungent sorrow at a friend's death than Johnson, though he would suffer no one else to complain of their losses in the same way; "for (says he) we must either outlive our friends...or our friends must outlive us; and I see no man that would hesitate about the choice." (Mrs Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson in Sherbo 101)

In the next batch of items the schema 'neither X nor Y' is exemplified:

Thus all the business of the world is transacted by artless and easy talk, neither sublimed by fancy, nor discoloured by affectation... (Idler 34, II 108)

He ['Gelidus', the type of the anti-human scientist] has totally divested himself of all human sensations; he has neither eye for beauty, nor ear for complaint; he neither

rejoices at the good fortune of his nearest friend, nor mourns for any publick or private calamity. (Rambler 24, III 133)

I suppose every man is shocked when he hears how frequently soldiers are wishing for war. ...but those who desire it most, are neither prompted by malevolence nor patriotism; they neither pant for laurels, nor delight in blood; but long to be delivered from the tyranny of idleness, and restored to the dignity of active beings. (Idler 21, II 67)

[The Metaphysical poets] cannot be said to have imitated any thing: they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter nor represented the operations of intellect. ("Cowley", Lives I 19)

Be pleased, Sir, to inform those of my sex, who have minds capable of nobler sentiments, that...they may fix a time, at which cards shall cease to be in fashion, or be left only to those who have neither beauty to be loved, nor spirit to be feared; neither knowledge to teach, nor modesty to learn... (Rambler 15, III 84)

It bears remarking that in all but one of the examples presented above there occurs a doubling of the 'neither X nor Y' formation, a phenomenon that puts one in mind of the doubling of the 'X without Y' schema when it appears in a terminal position (v. supra). In discussing the doubling of the 'X without Y' formation I noted that among the reasons for it were Johnson's impulse to achieve the 'right' cadence as well as his predilection for the symmetry of the parallel construction. These same factors, in my opinion, are operative in the doubling of the 'neither X nor Y' formation. Nor is this doubling a mere rhetorical 'flourish' (any more than it is in the case of the 'X without Y' schema). We do not have to do here, in other words, with a construction whose doubled member simply restates in different terms the matter of the first segment just for the sake of formal symmetry or tidy parallelism; on the other hand, the second member does not ordinarily introduce a new element into the argument; instead it functions, through amplification or qualification, to augment or to modify the idea broached in the first. The next crop of examples illustrative of 'Distinctions by way of Alternatives' is built on the formation 'whether X or Y':

Whether it be that they [women] have less courage to stand against opposition, or that their desire of admiration makes them sacrifice their principles to the poor pleasure of worthless praise, it is certain...that female goodness seldom keeps its ground against laughter, flattery, or fashion. (Rambler 70, IV 6)

...whether it be, that every man hates falsehood, from the natural congruity of truth to his faculties of reason, or that every man is jealous of the honour of his understanding, and thinks his discernment consequentially called in question, whenever any thing is exhibited under a borrowed form. (Rambler 20, III 110)

...whether it be that we comprehend but few of the possibilities of life, or that life itself affords little variety... ("Butler", Lives I 211)

Whether this new drama [Gay's Beggar's Opera] was the product of judgement or of luck the praise of it must be given to the inventor... ("Gay", Lives II 283)

> That [Shakespeare] once designed to have brought Falstaff on the scene again, we know from himself; but whether he could contrive no train of adventures suitable to his character, or could match him with no companions likely to quicken his humour, or could open no new vein of pleasantry...he has here [in Henry V] for ever discarded him... (Johnson on Shakespeare VIII 541-42)
>
> ...every man, whether he copies or invents, whether he delivers his own thoughts or those of another, has often found himself deficient in the power of expression... (Adventurer 138, II 495)

The final example in this category has a legalistic coloration, being modelled on the formula 'If W...let X...; if Y...let Z...':

> There can be no reason, why any debtor should be imprisoned, but that he may be compelled to payment; and a term should therefore be fixed, in which the creditor should exhibit his accusation of concealed property. If such property can be discovered, let it be given to

the creditor; if the charge is not offered, or cannot be proved, let the prisoner be dismissed. (Idler 22, II 70)

Continuing to work my way through this grouping of 'Rhetorical Distinction-making', I next propose to bring under scrutiny the category to which I have assigned the title 'Distinctions by way of Denial/Exclusion followed by Affirmation'.

Distinctions by way of Denial/Exclusion followed by Affirmation

The principle of differentiation in this category turns upon something denied being played off against something affirmed. This basic paradigm articulates itself formulaically - that is to say, rhetorically - through two different schemata which reflect different purposes and circumstances of use: where Johnson distinguishes between situations or states-of-affairs the play of denial and affirmation manifests itself in the formation 'not X...but Y'; where he distinguishes between causes, that is, between inapplicable ones that are negatived and applicable ones that are affirmed, the formula which then comes into play is 'not because X, but because Y'. In a few cases, in both

formations, the schematic sequence is reversed, such that 'not X...but Y' is remodelled as 'X...but not Y', while 'not because X, but because Y' is recast as 'because X, not because Y'. The first batch of examples given below consists of items built on the schema 'not X...but Y', the second batch is built on the schema 'not because X, but because Y'. Placed at the head of the 'not X...but Y' list are a couple of items in which the formation is doubled:

> The mischievous consequences of vice and folly...are best discovered by those relations which are levelled with the general surface of life, which tell not how any man became great, but how he was made happy; not how he lost the favour of his prince, but how he became discontented with himself. (Idler 84, II 262)
>
> ...it is not folly but pride, not error but deceit, which the world means to persecute, when it raises the full cry of nature to hunt down affectation. (Rambler 20, III 112)
>
> [Forgotten authors] owed the honours which they once obtained, not to judgment or to genius, to labour or to art, but to the prejudice of faction, the stratagem of intrigue, or the

servility of adulation. (Rambler 106, IV 201)

...the world...swarms with writers whose wish is not to be studied but to be read. (Idler 30, II 94)

...when once [an author] begins to contrive how his sentiments may be received, not with most ease to his reader, but with most advantage to himself, he then transfers his consideration from words to sounds...and as he grows more elegant becomes less intelligible. (Idler 36, II 112-113)

If an author...writes not to make others learned, but to boast the learning which he possesses himself...he counteracts the first end of writing... (Idler 70, II 217)

Beauclerk had such a propensity to satire, that at one time Johnson said to him, "You...have often given me pain, not from the power of what you said, but from seeing your intention." (Life 175)

We talked of gaming, and animadverted on it with severity. ...JOHNSON: Sir, I do not call a gamester a dishonest man, but I call him an

unsocial man, an unprofitable man. (Life 481)

In the following instances the schematic sequence is reversed, such that 'not X...but Y' is remodelled as 'X...but not Y':

> ...good sense alone...manages its possessions well, but does not increase them; it...preserves safety, but never gains supremacy. ("Pope", Lives III 217)
>
> [Sir Thomas Browne's style] strikes, but does not please; it commands but does not allure. (in Brown 293)
>
> [Swift's style] instructs, but does not persuade. ("Swift", Lives III 52)

In the examples given below Johnson distinguishes between inapplicable and applicable causes, and so the verbal formula that comes into play is that of 'not because X, but because Y':

> BOSWELL: You would not solicit employment, Sir, if you were a lawyer. JOHNSON: No, Sir, but not because I should think it wrong, but because I should disdain it. (Life 683) [Commenting on Johnson's pronouncement, Boswell remarks: "This was a good distinction, which will be felt by

men of just pride"]

The subject of grief for the loss of relations and friends [was] introduced...BOSWELL: But, Sir, we do not approve of a man who very soon forgets the loss of a wife or a friend. JOHNSON: Sir, we disapprove of him, not because he soon forgets his grief, for the sooner it is forgotten the better, but because we suppose, that if he forgets his wife or his friend soon, he has not had much affection for them. (Life 825-26)

...there are minds so impatient of inferiority, that...they return benefits, not because recompence is a pleasure, but because obligation is a pain. (Rambler 87, IV 96) [This item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata' (positive vs. negative: pleasure< >pain)]

Men often call themselves poor, not because they want necessaries, but because they have not more than they want. (Sermons XIV 59)

[The man given to finding fault with others rather than with himself] sets himself at ease,

not because he can refute the charges advanced against him, but because he can censure his accusers with equal justice... (Rambler 76, IV 36)

...the arguments for purity of life fail of their due influence, not because they have been considered and confuted, but because they have been passed over without consideration. (Rambler 87, IV 98) [This item is simultaneously an instance of 'Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata': action vs. abstention]

I eat not because I am hungry, but because I am idle... (Adventurer 102, II 438)

I conclude my analysis of the present category with an item that exhibits a reversal of the normal schematic sequence:

[Newton] stood alone...because he had left the rest of mankind behind him, not because he deviated from the beaten tract. (Adventurer 131, II 482)

The category I propose to consider next bears the title 'Distinctions by way of Antimetabole (or Chiasmus)'.

Distinctions by way of Antimetabole (or Chiasmus)

In the late nineteenth century the term "chiasmus", derived from the Greek letter 'chi' (X), began to supersede the earlier term "antimetabole" as the preferred name for that rhetorical figure defined by Abrams as "a sequence of two phrases or clauses which are parallel in syntax, but reverse the order of the corresponding words" (183). It is evident, then, that chiasmus is a figure which mimetically enacts the actual crossover shape of the grapheme 'chi'. The aptness of this figure for distinction-making was noted as long ago as 1599 by John Hoskins who, in his Directions for Speech and Style, describes antimetabole as "a sharp and witty figure [that] shows out of the same words a pithy distinction of meaning..." (in Vickers 110). Antimetabole, indeed, conjoins to a singular degree among rhetorical figures a capacity for developing distinctions with the structural characteristics of balance, equipoise and parallelism. No wonder this figure so appealed to Johnson[75]. Here follow

[75] In Brian Vickers's view, Johnson's prose style, in its totality, is grounded in, and conditioned by, classical rhetoric. Says Vickers: "...obviously the prose of Dr Johnson...is built around the schemes and tropes evolved by Gorgias and Isocrates" (56). (Gorgias and Isocrates were among the most influential of the ancient Greek rhetoricians). Cf. in this context Johnson's remark addressed to the German diplomat, H P Sturz: "It is my serious opinion that our living languages must be formed quite slavishly on the model of the classics if our writings are to endure" (in Hardy 116-17).

some examples of his use of it, beginning with an instance of multiple chiasmus:

> Not only our speculations influence our practice, but our practice reciprocally influences our speculations. We not only do what we approve, but there is danger lest in time we come to approve what we do, though for no other reason but that we do it. A man is always desirous of being at peace with himself; and when he cannot reconcile his passions to his conscience, he will attempt to reconcile his conscience to his passions... (Sermons XIV 218)
>
> None can be pleased without praise, and few can be praised without falsehood; few can be assidious without servility, and none can be servile without corruption. (Rambler 104, IV 194) [This is a real 'cat's cradle' of chiasmus]
>
> [P]ride...rather endeavours, by fame, to supply the want of knowledge, than by knowledge to arrive at fame. (Sermons XIV 91)
>
> There are in these verses [James Elphinston's translation of Martial, 1782] too much folly for madness...and too much madness for folly. (Mrs

Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson in Sherbo 80)

Dr. Johnson, being asked by a lady what love was, replied, "It was the wisdom of a fool and the folly of the wise." (in Hill II 393)

"Now, Sir, what a man avows, he is not ashamed to think; though many a man thinks, what he is ashamed to avow." (Life 930)

He [Waller] doubtless praised some whom he would have been afraid to marry, and perhaps married one whom he would have been ashamed to praise. ("Waller", Lives I 254)

"This man (said he [of Lord Chesterfield]) I thought had been a Lord among wits; but, I find, he is only a wit among Lords!" (Life 188)

JOHNSON: I should drink claret too, if it would give me that ["the careless gaiety of boyish days"]; but it does not: it neither makes boys men, nor men boys. (Life 1127)

The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
For we that live to please, must please to live.
("Drury-Lane Prologue", Poems VI 89)

It ought to be the first endeavour of a writer to distinguish nature from custom, or that which

is established because it is right, from that which is right only because it is established... (Rambler 156, V 70)

There may possibly be books without a polished language, but there can be no polished language without books. (Journey 116)

...new desires, and artificial passions are by degrees produced; and, from having wishes only in consequence of our wants, we begin to feel wants in consequence of our wishes... (Rambler 49, III 264)

Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful. (Rasselas, in Bronson 690)

Of things that terminate in human life the world is the proper judge: to despise its sentence, if it were possible, is not just; and if it were just is not possible. ("Pope", Lives III 210)

The necessity of complying with times and of sparing persons is the great impediment of biography. ...Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost for ever.

What is known can seldom be immediately told, and when it might be told it is no longer known. ("Addison", Lives II 116)

Much therefore of that humour which transported the last century with merriment is lost to us, who do not know the sour solemnity...of the ancient Puritans. ...Our grandfathers knew the picture from the life; we judge of the life by contemplating the picture. ("Butler", Lives I 214)

In this work ["The Rape of the Lock"] are exhibited in a very high degree the two most engaging powers of an author: new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new. ("Pope", Lives III 233)

Hudibras wants a plan, because it is left imperfect; Alma is imperfect, because it seems never to have had a plan. ("Prior", Lives II 205)

He that will eat bread, must plow and sow; though it is not certain, that he who plows and sows shall eat bread. (Sermons XIV 132)

...few men have been made infidels by argument

> and reflection; their actions are not generally the result of their reasonings, but their reasonings of their actions. (Sermons XIV 54)
>
> The difference, he [Johnson] observed, between a well-bred and an ill-bred man is this: "...You love the one till you find reason to hate him; you hate the other till you find reason to love him." (Life 1311)
>
> He thus discriminated, to Dr Percy, Bishop of Dromore, his progress at his two grammar-schools. "At one, I learnt much in the school, but little from the master; in the other, I learnt much from the master, but little in the school." (Life 37)

To the sixth of the categories making up this grouping, I have assigned the rather cumbersome title 'Distinguishing the "Truth of the Matter" from Commonly Held Beliefs'.

Distinguishing the "Truth of the Matter" from Commonly Held Beliefs

Johnson ordinarily signals an intention to distinguish the "truth of the matter" from a backdrop of commonly held

beliefs by means of the introductory formula "But the truth is..."[76]. When he has recourse to this formula, the suggestion is that the truth being affirmed is of a more or less incontrovertible character. An equivalent schema is "Sir, the very reverse of this is the truth...", which simply makes explicit what "But the truth is..." only implies, namely, that the position being affirmed stands in opposition to the commonly held view outlined immediately before.

Somewhat more concessive and more argumentative (that is, less categorical) in complexion than the formulae remarked above is the collocation "But this reason is for the most part very falsely assigned...". Then, too, in a minority of instances, Johnson differentiates the 'truth of the matter' from commonly held beliefs by means of conventionally diffident and demurring formulations - for example, the schema "It cannot be denied that..." (the very phrasing of which implicitly acknowledges the possibility of denial). More diffident still - almost apologetic, indeed, though conventionally so - is the expression "But I am afraid..." (suggestive of a wish that 'things' - here

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[76] It is owing to the formulaic quality of this and its affiliated locutions that the present category has been placed under the head of 'Rhetorical Distinction-making'. It would otherwise have been more appropriately assigned to 'Conceptual Distinction-making'.

the 'truth of the matter' - might somehow be different, combined with the recognition that they cannot be). Finally, when he has recourse to the phrase "Yet I have not found...", his appeal is to the testimony of personal experience alone - in contrast to the universal and categorical purport of "But the truth is...". In the examples which follow, the progression is from the most categorical items to the least:

> I introduced the topick, which is often ignorantly urged, that the Universities of England are too rich... JOHNSON: Sir, the very reverse of this is the truth; the English Universities are not rich enough. (Life 726)
>
> ...there are readers who discover that in this passage "So stretch'd out huge in length the arch-fiend lay"
>
> [Paradise Lost] I. 209
>
> a long form is described in a long line; but the truth is, that length of body is only mentioned in a slow line... (Rambler 95, IV 142) [emphasis in original]
>
> The lines given to the chorus [in Henry V] have many admirers; but the truth is, that in them a

little may be praised, and much must be forgiven... (Johnson on Shakespeare VIII 566)

[Milton's diction] bears little resemblance to that of any former writer, and...is so far removed from common use that an unlearned reader when he first opens his book finds himself surprised by a new language.

This novelty has been, by those who can find nothing wrong in Milton, imputed to his laborious endeavours after words suitable to the grandeur of his ideas. "Our language," says Addison, "sunk under him." But the truth is, that both in prose and verse, he had formed his style by a perverse and pedantick principle. He was desirous to use English words with a foreign idiom. ("Milton", Lives I 189-90)

It is commonly supposed that the uniformity of a studious life affords no matter for narration; but the truth is, that of the most studious life a great part passes without study. (Idler 102, II 312)

Those who made the laws, have apparently supposed, that every deficiency of payment is

the crime of the debtor. But the truth is, that the creditor always shares the act, and often more than shares the guilt of improper trust. (Idler 22, II 70)

Those who are oppressed by their own reputation, will perhaps not be comforted by hearing that their cares are unnecessary. But the truth is, that no man is much regarded by the rest of the world. (Rambler 159, V 84)

It has been so long said as to be commonly believed that the true characters of men may be found in their letters, and that he who writes to his friend lays his heart open before him. But the truth is that such were the simple friendships of the Golden Age, and are now the friendships only of children. ("Pope", Lives III 206-207) [emphasis in original]

It is not uncommon to charge the difference between promise and performance, between profession and reality, upon deep design and studied deceit; but the truth is, that there is very little hypocrisy in the world; we do not so often endeavour or wish to impose on others as

on ourselves... (Idler 27, II 85)

"Many things which are false are transmitted from book to book, and gain credit in the world. One of these is the cry against the evil of luxury. Now the truth is, that luxury produces much good." (Life 755)

Men are supposed to remit their labours, because they find their labours to have been vain; and to search no longer after truth and wisdom, because they at last despair of finding them.

But this reason is for the most part very falsely assigned. Of learning, as of virtue, it may be affirmed, that it is at once honoured and neglected... (Idler 94, II 290)

Nothing is more common than to find men whose works are now totally neglected, mentioned with praises by their contemporaries...It cannot, however, be denied that many have sunk into oblivion, whom it were unjust to number with this despicable class. (Rambler 106, IV 201)

We have...been encouraged to believe that our tongues...may, by the help of our hands and legs, obtain an uncontroulable dominion over the

most stubborn audience...If by slight of hand, or nimbleness of foot...these wonders can be performed, he that shall neglect to attain the free use of his limbs may be justly censured as criminally lazy. But I am afraid that no specimen of such effects will easily be shewn. (Idler 90, II 279)

The world has been long amused with the mention of policy in publick transactions, and of art in private affairs; they have been considered as the effects of great qualities, and as unattainable by men of the common level: yet I have not found many performances either of art, or policy, that required such stupendous efforts of intellect... (Rambler 79, IV 52)

In one of his letters, the poet William Cowper pays Johnson, his rough contemporary, this handsome compliment:

He has...a happy talent of correcting the popular opinion, upon all occasions where it is erroneous; and this he does with the boldness of a man who will think for himself, but, at the same time, with a justness of sentiment that convinces us he does not differ from others

through affectation, but because he has a sounder judgement. (160)

I doubt whether any aspect of Johnson's output, written or spoken, better bears out or better merits Cowper's tribute than his gift for distinguishing the 'truth of the matter' from the 'received view', and for doing so with such independent-mindedness and psychological penetration[77].

The seventh and last category subsumed under 'Rhetorical Distinction-making' bears the title 'Distinction-making by way of Enumeration/Hierarchical Ordering'.

Distinction-making by way of Enumeration/Hierarchical Ordering

It may seem at first sight that the device of enumeration is not sufficiently formulaic to qualify as a rhetorical proceeding and should be viewed instead as a purely organizational one. But in fact enumeration has its roots in ancient rhetoric, in the figure of enumeratio which involved recapitulating the heads of an argument in

[77] To be "perpetually suspicious of commonly accepted opinions" was indeed a kind of Johnsonian watchword, according to James L Clifford (1955:245).

the concluding part of an oration. From the standpoint of distinction-making, the technique of enumeration stands out for the clarity and explicitness with which it registers differentiation. In his use of this technique as a vehicle for distinction-making, Johnson sometimes explicitly signals his practice ("In the first place...in the second place..."), but at other times leaves it implicit, omitting to number-tag the items he discriminates. The evidence suggests, somewhat against expectation, that his enumerations, whether explicit or implicit, are not ordinarily arranged in hierarchical order; that is, in a ranked order of perceived importance, with the first-enumerated item being the most important and the last-enumerated one the least. Instead, the sequence of enumerated items/ideas seems in most cases to be more or less random and, in so far, mutable, even reversible. In the first two of the ensuing examples, however, the hierarchizing, evaluative impulse enters into the picture as well, complementing the purely enumerative one:

> There are three distinct kinds of judges upon all new authors or productions: the first are those who know no rules, but pronounce entirely from their natural taste and feelings; the

second are those who know and judge by rules; and the third are those who know, but are above the rules. These last are those you should wish to satisfy. Next to them rate the natural judges; but ever despise those opinions that are formed by the rules. (Recorded by Fanny Burney; in Greene (1970) 194)

Talking of conversation, he said, "There must, in the first place, be knowledge, there must be materials; in the second place, there must be a command of words; in the third place, there must be imagination, to place things in such views as they are not commonly seen in; and in the fourth place, there must be presence of mind, and a resolution that is not to be overcome by failures: this last is an essential requisite; for want of it many people do not excel in conversation." (Life 1195-96)

[Johnson] soon settled to more comfortable Talk; and first of all agreed that there were three sorts of Love; the first is that well known Passion raised by Desire & always accompanied by it; the second that Love which is excited by

Tenderness, and accompanied by Contempt, as the Love one has for Children - & even favourite Animals; the third is that one feels for one's Friend; the Delight one has in his Company, the Pride one shares in his Praises; the enthusiastic Partiality one has for all he does, and the Influence one suffers him to have over all one's other Passions. - this Love says he is accompanied by Vanity, and the vainest People are most susceptible of it. (Thrale 57-58)

The two offices of memory are collection and distribution; by one images are accumulated, and by the other produced for use. Collection is always the employment of our first years, and distribution commonly that of our advanced age. (Idler 44, II 137)

BOSWELL: No quality will get a man more friends than a disposition to admire the qualities of others. I do not mean flattery, but a sincere admiration. JOHNSON: Nay, Sir, flattery pleases very generally. In the first place, the flatterer may think what he says to be true: but, in the second place, whether he thinks so

or not, he certainly thinks those whom he flatters of consequence enough to be flattered. (Life 627)

JOHNSON: ...When I drank wine, I scorned to drink it when in company. I have drunk many a bottle by myself; in the first place, because I had need of it to raise my spirits; in the second place, because I would have nobody to witness its effects upon me. (Life 747)

I asked him why he doated on a coach so? and received for answer, 'That in the first place, the company was shut in with him there; and could not escape, as out of a room: in the next place, he heard all that was said in a carriage...' (Mrs Thrale, Anecdotes of Dr Johnson in Sherbo 151) [emphasis in original]

On occasion of Dr. Johnson's publishing his pamphlet of The False Alarm, there came out a very angry answer...In the answerer's pamphlet, it had been said with solemnity, "Do you consider, Sir, that a House of Commons is to the people as a Creature is to its Creator?" To this question, said Dr. Johnson, I could have

replied, that - in the first place - the idea of a CREATOR must be such as that He has a power to unmake or annihilate His creature.

Then it cannot be conceived that a creature can make laws for its CREATOR. (Life 1087)

...when I rose to go to church in the afternoon, I was informed there had been an earthquake, of which, it seems, the shock had been felt, in some degree, at Ashbourne. JOHNSON: Sir, it will be much exaggerated in popular talk: for, in the first place, the common people do not accurately adapt their thoughts to the objects; nor, secondly, do they accurately adapt their words to their thoughts... (Life 825)

In the two concluding examples given below, Johnson's enumerative procedure is implicit - the discriminated items, we observe, are not number-tagged:

It is difficult to enumerate the several motives, which procure to books the honour of perusal: spite, vanity, and curiosity, hope and fear, love and hatred, every passion which incites to any other action, serves at one time or other to stimulate a reader. (Adventurer

137, II 490)

> It is difficult to enumerate every species of authors whose labours counteract themselves. The man of exuberance and copiousness, who diffuses every thought thro' so many diversities of expression, that it is lost like water in a mist. The ponderous dictator of sentences, whose notions are delivered in the lump, and are, like uncoined bullion, of more weight than use. The liberal illustrator, who shews by examples and comparisons what was clearly seen when it was first proposed; and the stately son of demonstration, who proves with mathematical formality what no man has yet pretended to doubt. (Idler 36, II 113)

In both the above instances Johnson's enumeration is preceded, interestingly enough, by the semi-disclaimer "It is difficult to enumerate...". This move amounts to a form of preterition, the rhetorical gambit whereby one contrives to say something under cover of professing to avoid mention of it. It is a move that dramatizes in miniature what is 'writ large' by the evidence contained in the seven categories mustered under the head of 'Rhetorical

Distinction-making' - namely, that Samuel Johnson was a complete master of the tropes and figures of rhetoric, and that he was expert at putting this mastery to use in the service of distinction-making.

Functional Distinction-making

Under this head are subsumed but two categories which bear the following titles: 'Disallowing a Distinction Claimed - in order to Dispel Confusion or Misperception', and its inverse, 'Asserting a Distinction in order to Dispel Confusion or Misperception'. The phrase "in order to..." in these titles unmistakably points to the grouping's functional character which derives from the purposive nature of the distinctions that the items in the two categories are built on. These items could doubtless have found a comfortable enough billet under the roof of some other category or grouping (most readily perhaps under the roof of 'Conceptual Distinction-making'), but since what they presidingly stood out for, in my judgment, was their functional, purposive character, it seemed well to set them apart with a view to provisioning separate categories organized into an independent grouping labelled 'Functional'. I propose now to examine the two categories

making up this slender grouping.

Disallowing a Distinction Claimed - in order to Dispel Confusion or Misperception

Although there seems at first sight to be no justification for viewing as an instance of actual distinction-making on Johnson's part his refusal to allow a distinction claimed by an interlocutor, in point of fact the terms in which the claimed distinction is disallowed are such as shadow forth the lineaments of an alternative distinction - the one he upholds. That being so, the inclusion of this category in a study devoted to Johnson's distinction-making seemed to me justifiable. The items provisioning this category are these:

> At the Reverend Mr M'Lean's, Dr Johnson asked him, if the people of Col had any superstitions. He said, "No." The cutting peats at the increase of the moon was mentioned as one; but [M'Lean] would not allow it, saying, it was not a superstition, but a whim. Dr Johnson would not admit the distinction. There were many superstitions, he maintained, not connected with religion; and this was one of them. (Hebrides

Journal 347)

Disallowing the distinction implied by the line "An honest courtier, yet a patriot too" from Pope's epitaph on Sir William Trumbull, Johnson observes:

> There is no opposition between an honest courtier and a patriot; for an honest courtier cannot but be a patriot[78]. ("Pope", Lives III 258) [emphasis in original]

> On Friday, May 7, I breakfasted with him at Mr. Thrale's in the Borough. While we were alone, I endeavoured as well as I could to apologise for a lady who had been divorced from her husband by act of Parliament. I said, that he had used her very ill, had behaved brutally to her, and that she could not continue to live with him without having her delicacy contaminated...Seduced, perhaps, by the charms of the lady in question, I thus attempted to palliate what I was sensible could not be justified; for, when I had finished my harangue, my venerable friend gave me a proper check: "My

[78] With reference to this pronouncement, the editor of the Lives, G B Hill, slyly comments: "Johnson forgot his description of patriotism as 'the last refuge of a scoundrel.'" (III 258, footnote 1)

> dear Sir, never accustom your mind to mingle virtue and vice. The woman's a whore, and there's an end on't." (Life 536-37) [The distinction implicitly claimed by Boswell is between well-used and ill-used wives. Disallowing this claim, Johnson for his part implicitly contends that the only valid distinction is between honourable and dishonourable ones]

Disallowing the implicit claim of a distinction between a despotic father and a despotic prince, Johnson takes the view that

> The regal and parental tyrant differ only in the extent of their dominions, and the number of their slaves. The same passions cause the same miseries...Capricious injunctions, partial decisions, unequal allotments, distributions of reward not by merit but by fancy, and punishments regulated not by the degree of the offence, but by the humour of the judge, are too frequent where no power is known but that of a father. (Rambler 148, V 25) [So the proper distinction, Johnson implicitly argues, is not

between tyrant-father and tyrant-prince but rather between tyranny on the one side (symbolized by the figure of the father) and non-tyranny on the other (symbolized by the figure of the mother?)]

The examples and events of history press, indeed, upon the mind with the weight of truth; but when they are reposited in the memory, they are oftener employed for shew than use...Between falsehood and useless truth there is little difference. (Idler 84, II 262) [Johnson is implying, therefore, that the correct distinction is not between falsehood and truth (as is universally supposed) but rather between falsehood and useful truth]

I proceed now to a consideration of the second category in this grouping.

Asserting a Distinction in order to Dispel Confusion or Misperception

The first example I propose to bring forward under this head is an extended one. It features Johnson, in virtuoso form, launching a broadside of incisive

distinctions aimed at dispelling the perplexities with which the "sons of sophistry" have "darkened" the perspicuous injunction "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them." After this lengthy item there follow several shorter ones constructed on basically the same plan; this involves a two-step operation in which Johnson first zeroes in on the erroneous distinction and clears it out of the way, and then explicitly formulates the correct one, the one he regards as necessary to the purpose of dispelling confusion and misperception. He also has recourse to a more compact method of achieving this end; here his procedure is to formulate, with singular precision, the distinction as it should be, while at the same time noting (ordinarily through the use of the verb 'confound') that it has fallen victim to confusion or misperception. Admirably economical, this is a one-step operation which enables Johnson to register a correct distinction in the very act of pointing up somebody else's failure to do so. The two techniques here outlined furnish a principle of arrangement for the evidence now to be presented: accordingly, the first four items below exemplify the two-step approach while the last six illustrate the one-step method:

The measure of justice prescribed to us, in our transactions with others, is remarkably clear and comprehensive: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them." ...

Over this law, indeed, some sons of sophistry have been subtle enough to throw mists, which have darkened their own eyes. To perplex this universal principle, they have enquired whether a man, conscious to himself of unreasonable wishes, be bound to gratify them in another. But surely there needed no long deliberation to conclude, that the desires, which are to be considered by us as the measure of right, must be such as we approve, and that we ought to pay no regard to those expectations in others which we condemn in ourselves, and which, however they may intrude upon our imagination, we know it our duty to resist and suppress.

One of the most celebrated cases which have been produced as requiring some skill in the direction of conscience to adapt them to this great rule, is that of a criminal asking mercy

of his judge, who cannot but know that if he was in the state of the supplicant, he should desire that pardon which he now denies. The difficulty of this sophism will vanish, if we remember that the parties are, in reality, on one side the criminal, and on the other the community of which the magistrate is only the minister, and by which he is intrusted with the publick safety. The magistrate, therefore, in pardoning a man unworthy of pardon, betrays the trust with which he is invested, gives away what is not his own, and, apparently, does to others what he would not that others should do to him. ...

One occasion of uncertainty and hesitation, in those by whom this great rule has been commented and dilated, is the confusion of what the exacter casuists are careful to distinguish, "debts of justice" and "debts of charity." ...

The discharge of the "debts of charity", or duties which we owe to others not merely as required by justice, but as dictated by benevolence, admits in its own nature greater complication of circumstances and greater

latitude of choice. Justice is indispensably and universally necessary, and what is necessary must always be limited, uniform, and distinct. But beneficence...is...for the most part...elective and voluntary. We may certainly, without injury to our fellow-beings, allow in the distribution of kindness something to our affections, and change the measure of our liberality according to our opinions and prospects, our hopes and fears. (Rambler 81, IV 61-63)

I mentioned with much regret the extravagance of the representative of a great family in Scotland, by which there was danger of its being ruined; and as Johnson respected it for its antiquity, he joined with me in thinking it would be happy if this person should die. Mrs Thrale seemed shocked at this, as feudal barbarity; and said, "I do not understand this preference of the estate to its owner; of the land to the man who walks upon that land." JOHNSON: Nay, Madam, it is not a preference of the land to its owner, it is the preference of

a family to an individual. Here is an establishment in a country, which is of importance for ages, not only to the chief but to his people...; that this should be destroyed by one idle fellow is a sad thing. (Life 681)

Talking on the subject of taste in the arts, he said, that difference of taste was, in truth, difference of skill. BOSWELL: But, Sir, is there not a quality called taste, which consists merely in perception or in liking? For instance, we find people differ much as to what is the best style of English composition. Some think Swift's the best; others prefer a fuller and grander way of writing. JOHNSON: Sir, you must first define what you mean by style, before you can judge who has a good taste in style, and who has a bad. The two classes of persons whom you have mentioned don't differ as to good and bad. They both agree that Swift has a good neat style; but one loves a neat style, another loves a style of more splendour. (Life 492-93)

"I think (said Hicky) gentility and morality are inseparable." BOSWELL: By no means, Sir. The

genteelest characters are often the most immoral. Does not Lord Chesterfield give precepts for uniting wickedness and the graces?...[M]ost vices may be committed very genteelly: a man may debauch his friend's wife genteelly: he may cheat at cards genteelly. HICKY: I do not think <u>that</u> is genteel. BOSWELL: Sir, it may not be like a gentleman, but it may be genteel. JOHNSON: You are meaning two different things. One means exteriour grace; the other honour. It is certain that a man may be very immoral with exteriour grace. Lovelace, in <u>Clarissa</u>, is a very genteel and a very wicked character. (<u>Life</u> 610) [emphasis in original]

The following items exemplify Johnson's condensed 'one-step' method:

MISS SEWARD: There is one mode of the fear of death, which is certainly absurd; and that is the dread of annihilation, which is only a pleasing sleep without a dream. JOHNSON: It is neither pleasing, nor sleep; it is nothing. ...The lady confounds annihilation, which is nothing, with the apprehension of it, which is

dreadful. It is in the apprehension of it that the horrour of annihilation consists. (Life 950-51)

...far the greater part of mankind has, in the wantonness of abundance, confounded natural with artificial desires... (Idler 37, II 115)

When first I came to this lady, I had nothing like the learning that I have now...I was an ignorant girl; and she...confound[ing] want of knowledge with want of understanding, began...to despair of bringing me to any thing... (Idler 46, II 144-45)

Money and wealth have by the use of commercial language been so long confounded, that they are commonly supposed to be the same... (Journey 147)

Affectation [in poetry], however opposite to ease, is sometimes mistaken for it, and those who aspire to gentle elegance, collect female phrases and fashionable barbarisms, and imagine that style to be easy which custom has made familiar. (Idler 77, II 240)

Whence these criticks derived the notion of a

> new language appropriated to Caliban I cannot find: They certainly mistook brutality of sentiment for uncouthness of words. (Johnson on Shakespeare VII 123)

The Long Haul is almost over - this chapter at last is heading into the home straight: only one more grouping and category remains to be examined; I have named the grouping 'Pictorial Distinction-making'.

Pictorial Distinction-making

This grouping is so denominated because the items it contains frame what Johnson in the last of the Ramblers calls his "pictures of life" (V 319). So what I'm going to be dealing with under this head are examples of his descriptive prose, a vein of writing neither as significant in his output nor as frequently met with as his argumentative, expository or didactic styles. Still, Johnson's 'pictures of life' are not to be dismissed as a trifling or merely incidental aspect of his oeuvre; they are a product after all of his indefatigable, searching and, as often as not, disenchanted survey of humankind and its doings. One is reminded in this connection of Mrs Thrale's comment that Johnson by the age of fifty-five

(when she first met him) had already "looked on the still-shifting scenes of life till he was weary" (in Sherbo 158) - an understandable weariness, considering how "very close" his "inspection of life" was (Life 145).

The question that suggests itself, though, is this: what do the 'still-shifting scenes of life' have to do with distinction-making? On what basis, in other words, can a grouping labelled 'Pictorial' find a place in a study devoted to Johnson's drive to distinguish? The answer to this question bears upon the particular way in which he is wont to view the ever-changing scene of life: the evidence suggests something approaching an inability to look upon it without at once breaking it up into a multiplicity of facets and 'angles', such that the 'pictures of life' which result turn out to be characterized by an extraordinarily high degree of differentiation and variegation. His wont, then, is to observe life with a gaze not only extensive (cf. "The Vanity of Human Wishes", line 1) but also intensive and finely discriminating - his is "a nice observation of the...external appearances of life", as Boswell puts it (Life 155). To be sure, many writers, particularly novelists and essayists, compose 'pictures of life' that impress by reason of their variegation and

differentiation, but my point here is that Johnson in this regard pushes things to a kind of limit, as I believe the evidence I shall be adducing will demonstrate. Therein lies the justification, it seems to me, for including the 'pictures of life' in a study devoted to his distinction-making.

There are however three further points I need to make before leading my evidence. First: Johnson's vivid and variegated 'pictures of life' are a product, as they are a proof, of the vigorous operation of his "most fertile imagination" (Life 1402). Second: in quite a number of them the pictorial element (or, synaesthetically, but perhaps more aptly expressed, the pictorial 'resonance') is particularly marked. While this feature plainly owes much to Johnson's manifest gift for lively and forceful description (several of the 'pictures' giving the impression indeed of being 'sallies', with the author out simply to delight in the exercise of his descriptive - and comical - powers), it owes even more to the fact that in the instances under discussion the various doings and happenings diversifying the described scene are represented as occurring simultaneously. And simultaneity of impression is the very hallmark of the way the pictorial

medium is experienced, of the way it is registered by eye and mind: being organized spatially, pictorial compositions are perforce 'read' simultaneously across their whole expanse (in contrast to the written word which, as it requires to be 'tracked' through time, can only be experienced linearly and consecutively). So by projecting the various facets of his scene on to the plane of simultaneity, Johnson succeeds in enhancing the pictorial - one could say the painterly - 'resonance' of several of his word-pictures, such that the impression they convey is rather of life paraded than just depicted[79].

The 'pictures of life' in which an effect of simultaneity is aimed at evoke not only a particularly strong painterly 'feel' but (for me, anyhow) even a particular painter. I refer to William Hogarth, whose energetic, often sardonic, depictions of the English social scene are crowded, like Johnson's verbal pictures, "with

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[79] The most pictorially 'resonant' of Johnson's 'pictures of life' may perhaps be viewed as social, humanly-busy analogues of the pictorially-conditioned landscape poetry composed by authors like Dyer and Thomson who, influenced in particular by the landscape paintings of Claude and Salvator Rosa (Hussey 19), came to see landscape through a painterly lens and to frame their descriptions of it in a self-consciously pictorializing way. Hussey calls these authors and their immediate followers the "Picturesque Poets" (18). In the opening section of Windsor Forest Pope briefly becomes one of their number as he sets about his descriptive business in a similarly pictorializing manner: building up his word-picture on an unmistakably painterly plan, he carefully 'blocks in', on an imaginary canvas, the principal natural features of a landscape imagined as lying stretched out beneath his gaze.

a bewildering array of discrepant incidents" (E D H Johnson 16) all represented (necessarily so, given the medium) as taking place simultaneously[80]. Though the comparison may seem an odd one, in light especially of Johnson's known indifference to the pictorial arts[81], nevertheless, when he sets to work filling a broad canvas with a multitude of activities represented as occurring simultaneously, I can't help thinking of him as a kind of literary Hogarth, working through the medium of words in much the way that Hogarth does through line, plane and colour. (This is not of course to suggest that Johnson was consciously influenced by Hogarth in the composition of his 'scenes'. There is no reason to doubt that each ploughed his own furrow, and therefore that similarities of approach or effect between some of their productions are the result purely of coincidence. Nonetheless, see Idler 15 (II 48-50) and Hogarth's engraving of "Evening", facing p.50 (in this, the Yale edition). Have we to do here with a manifestation of

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[80] One may cite, by way of example, the series The Four Times of the Day and An Election, and the individual works Southwark Fair and The March to Finchley.

[81] Johnson's "scorn of painting was such, that I have heard him say, that he should sit very quietly in a room hung round with the works of the greatest masters, and never feel the slightest disposition to turn them if their backs were outermost, unless it might be for the sake of telling Sir Joshua [Reynolds] that he had turned them" (Mrs Thrale, in Sherbo 93) [emphasis in original].

unconscious influence?).

The third and last point I want to make is this: in breaking up his scenes into their many facets, Johnson not seldom does so in a particular way, pressing into service a feature that bears remarking on. This is the feature of tagging each of the discriminated facets by means of an introductory cue or marker. Invariably these markers are pronouns which, being repeated or varied as the sentence (or passage) unfolds, develop by accumulation into 'pronoun chains', as it were. Examples of such 'chains' are:

"S o m e . . . s o m e . . . s o m e . . . " ;

"Some...others...none..."

"One...another...others..."

and so forth. These 'pronoun chains' not infrequently come into the picture when Johnson reaches for an effect of simultaneity; that this should be so is no accident since they are particularly well adapted to the achievement of such an effect: one of the simplest and most obvious ways after all of orchestrating an effect of simultaneity is through the use of constructions built, formulaically almost, on 'pronoun chains' - as, for example, in the schema "While some do X, others do Y, and yet others do Z".

In presenting my evidence I propose to turn the

contrast between 'pictures of life' that are 'pronoun-tagged' and those that are not into a principle of arrangement. Accordingly, the first batch of examples I shall be bringing forward consists of 'pronoun-tagged' items only.

The present grouping, in common with the one I have designated 'Ethical', contains but one category, to which I have given the title 'Discriminating the Manifold Facets of a "Picture of Life"'.

Discriminating the Manifold Facets of a 'Picture of Life'

The unifying feature of this first batch of items is, as I have noted, the fact that they are all 'pronoun-tagged' -strung out on 'pronoun chains', so to speak. As I am also interested, however, in spotlighting instances in which an effect of simultaneity is aimed at, I propose to place the four examples illustrative of this at the head of the listing which follows:

> When we analize the croud into individuals, it soon appears that the passions and imaginations of men will not easily suffer them to be idle...we see men conspire to fix an arbitrary value on that which is worthless in itself, and

then contend for the possession. One is a collector of fossils, of which he knows no other use than to shew them... The florist nurses a tulip, and repines that his rival's beds enjoy the same showers and sun shine with his own. This man is hurrying to a concert, only lest others should have heard the new musician before him; another bursts from his company to the play, because he fancies himself the patron of an actress; some spend the morning in consultations with their taylor, and some in directions to their cook; some are forming parties for cards, and some laying wagers at a horse race. (Adventurer 128, II 477)

[I]f we look round upon mankind, whom shall we find...that is not tormenting himself with a wish for something, of which all the pleasure...will cease at the moment of attainment? One man is beggering his posterity to build a house, which when finished he never will inhabit; another is levelling mountains to open a prospect, which, when he has once enjoyed it, he can enjoy no more; another is painting

cielings [sic], carving wainscot, and filling his apartments with costly furniture, only that some neighbouring house may not be richer or finer than his own. (Adventurer 119, II 463-64)

...money and time are the heaviest burthens of life, and...the unhappiest of all mortals are those who have more of either than they know how to use. To set himself free from these incumbrances, one hurries to New-market; another travels over Europe; one pulls down his house and calls architects about him; another buys a seat in the country...one makes collections of shells, and another searches the world for tulips and carnations. (Idler 30, II 93)

Our military operations are at last begun... Some are hoping for a bloody battle, because a bloody battle makes a vendible narrative; some are composing songs of victory; some are planning arches of triumph; and some are mixing fireworks for the celebration of a peace. (Idler 5, II 16-17)

In a long series of action, some will languish with fatigue, and some be drawn off by present

gratifications, some will loiter because others labour, and some will cease to labour because others loiter; and if once they come within prospect of success and profit, some will be greedy and others envious; some will undertake more than can perform...some will perform less than they undertake... (Adventurer 45, II 358)

[Note the 'Distinctions by way of Antimetabole' in this passage]

Names are easily collected [for a petition]. One man signs because he hates the papists; another because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes; one because it will vex the parson; another because he owes his landlord nothing; one because he is rich; another because he is poor; one to shew that he is not afraid, and another to shew that he can write. ("The False Alarm", X 338)

Some [readers of books] are fond to take a celebrated volume into their hands, because they hope to distinguish their penetration, by finding faults which have escaped the public; others eagerly buy it in the first bloom of

reputation, that they may join the chorus of praise...

Some read for stile, and some for argument: one has little care about the sentiment, he observes only how it is expressed; another regards not the conclusion, but is diligent to mark how it is inferred...

Some read that they may embellish their conversation, or shine in dispute; some that they may not be detected in ignorance, or want the reputation of literary accomplishments... (Adventurer 137, II 490)

Of the greater part [of mankind] it may be said, that God is not in their thoughts. One forgets him in his business, another in his amusements; one in eager enjoyment of today, another in solicitous contrivance for tomorrow. Some die amidst the gratifications of luxury, and some in the tumults of contests undecided, and purposes uncompleated. (Sermons XIV 161)

I come now to my next (and last) batch of examples - these are the ones without 'pronoun-tagging'. While all of them present highly variegated 'pictures of life', a few

stand out for their decidedly pictorial, indeed decidedly Hogarthian, 'resonance' - as evidenced in their liveliness, their busyness, their being crowded with an 'array of discrepant incidents', and their manifesting not just a comic but a caricatural quality.

The item which I have placed at the head of the list is particularly interesting for the explicitness and self-consciousness of its pictorializing stance. One observes that the passage begins by positing an explicitly painterly frame of reference for the description which is to follow and that it ends on a similarly iconographic note. In between Johnson composes his 'scene'. That he does so within the painterly frame of reference posited is evident, but it is equally evident that it is composed very much on the basis of <u>his</u> moral and political conception of what the painter should find significant in it. There is accordingly no mention made of the proper disposition of planes, objects and human figures, or of a fitting distribution of light and shade, or of a suitable palette of colours; instead, Johnson implicitly instructs the painter to focus on the revelation of character (as uniformly odious), on the presentation of emotion (as uniformly gross) and on the suggestion of mood and ambience

(as uniformly nasty). So the scene, while painterly, is painterly strictly on his terms and in accordance with his prepossessions; in other words, his 'picture' is really just the mirror of his prejudices and partisan opinions. What this strongly implies is that the summons to "our painters" at the beginning of the passage is no more than a rhetorical move. If this be so, as I believe it is, then it is a rhetorical move that belongs to a particular literary genre which enjoyed a short-lived vogue in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the genre of the 'Advice to a Painter'[82].

So much by way of preamble; now let the evidence speak:

> If the design were not too multifarious and

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[82] That Johnson presses this genre into service is not without its seasoning of irony as in his Life of Blackmore he makes the observation that Steele's satirical swipe (in Tatler 3, April 1709) at that author's "Advice to a Weaver of Tapestry" effectively "put an end to the species of writers that gave Advice to Painters" (Lives II 242) [emphasis in original].

The conventions of the 'Advice to a Painter' genre have been outlined by Mary T Osborne in her monograph Advice-to-a-Painter Poems. It is evident from her account of these conventions that Johnson, in the passage under discussion, adheres to them pretty closely. Osborne writes:

> ...the device of directing an artist was purely rhetorical, even when a specific painter was named. No picture was expected to result from the directions. The "advice" motif [served as a rhetorical resource enabling] the author to give pictorial, concrete, and, at times, even dramatic treatment to his subject matter... [It also] served as a framework for the poet's expression of opinions, prejudices, and emotions, for his characterizations and caricatures, for his description and narration of events. (9-10)

extensive, I should wish that our painters would attempt the dissolution of the parliament by Cromwel. The point of time may be chosen, when Cromwel, looking round the pandaemonium with contempt, ordered the bauble to be taken away; and Harrison laid hands on the Speaker to drag him from the chair.

The various appearances, which rage, and terror, and astonishment, and guilt, might exhibit, in the faces of that hateful assembly...the irresolute repugnance of some, the hypocritical submissions of others, the ferocious insolence of Cromwel, the rugged brutality of Harrison, and the general trepidation of fear and wickedness, would, if some proper disposition could be contrived, make a picture of unexampled variety, and irresistible instruction. (Idler 45, II 142)

Of declining reputation the symptoms are not less easily observed. If the author enters a coffee-house, he has a box to himself; if he calls at a bookseller's, the boy turns his back; and, what is the most fatal of all prognosticks,

authors will visit him in the morning, and talk to him hour after hour of the malevolence of criticks... [T]o this might be added all the changes of the countenance of a patron, traced from the first glow which flattery raises in his cheek, through ardour of fondness, vehemence of promise, magnificence of praise, excuse of delay, and lamentation of inability, to the last chill look of final dismission... (Idler 102, II 313)

...he, who cannot persuade himself to withdraw from society, must be content to pay a tribute of his time to a multitude of tyrants; to the loiterer, who makes appointments which he never keeps; to the consulter, who asks advice which he never takes; to the boaster, who blusters only to be praised; to the complainer, who whines only to be pitied; to the projector, whose happiness is to entertain his friends with expectations which all but himself know to be vain; to the oeconomist, who tells of bargains and settlements; to the politician, who predicts the fate of battles and breach of alliances; to

the usurer, who compares the different funds; and to the talker, who talks only because he loves to be talking. (Idler 14, II 47-48)

He that stands to contemplate the crouds that fill the streets of a populous city, will see many passengers whose air and motion it will be difficult to behold without contempt and laughter... The disposition to derision and insult is awakened by the softness of foppery, the swell of insolence, the liveliness of levity, or the solemnity of grandeur; by the sprightly trip, the stately stalk, the formal strut, and the lofty mien; by gestures intended to catch the eye, and by looks elaborately formed as evidences of importance. (Rambler 179, V 177-78) [Johnson in this passage is discriminating the various facets of affectation]

To bring a lover, a lady and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harrass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make

them meet in rapture and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of a modern dramatist. ("Preface" to Shakespeare, in Bronson (1971) 264-65)

Pleasure is therefore seldom such as it appears to others, nor often such as we represent it to ourselves. Of the ladies that sparkle at a musical performance, a very small number has any quick sensibility of harmonious sounds. But every one that goes has her pleasure. She has the pleasure of wearing fine cloaths, and of shewing them, of outshining those whom she suspects to envy her; she has the pleasure of appearing among other ladies in a place whither the race of meaner mortals seldom intrudes, and of reflecting that, in the conversations of the next morning, her name will be mentioned among those that sat in the first row; she has the pleasure of returning courtesies, or refusing to return them, of receiving compliments with

civility, or rejecting them with disdain. She has the pleasure of meeting some of her acquaintance, of guessing why the rest are absent, and of telling them that she saw the opera, on pretence of inquiring why they would miss it. She has the pleasure of being supposed to be pleased with a refined amusement, and of hoping to be numbered among the votresses of harmony. She has the pleasure of escaping for two hours the superiority of a sister, or the controul of a husband; and from all these pleasures she concludes that heavenly musick is the balm of life. (Idler 18, II 57-58)

Of fifty thousand men, now destined to different [military] stations, if we allow each to have been occasionally necessary only to four women, a short computation will inform us, that two hundred thousand ladies are left to languish in distress; two hundred thousand ladies, who must run to sales and auctions without an attendant; sit at the play, without a critick to direct their opinion; buy their fans by their own judgment; dispose shells by their own invention;

walk in the Mall without a gallant; go to the Gardens without a protector; and shuffle cards with vain impatience for want of a fourth to complete the party. (Idler 5, II 17)

Dear Mr. Rambler, did you ever hear any thing so charming? a whole year of confusion! When there has been a rout at mamma's, I have thought one night of confusion worth a thousand nights of rest; and if I can but see a year of confusion, a whole year, of cards in one room, and dancings in another, here a feast, and there a masquerade, and plays, and coaches, and hurries, and messages, and milaners, and raps at the door, and visits, and frolicks, and new fashions, I shall not care what they do with the rest of the time... (Rambler 107, IV 206)[83]

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[83] This passage and the two which immediately precede it train their satiric sights on the same target -the leisured (young) lady. Though these three vignettes are composed in an Horatian rather than a Juvenalian 'key' - their stance being detached and amused, their register comic and their mockery restrained, focussing rather on foibles than on vices - for all that they present a view of the 'modern fine lady' as a silly, superficial, giddy creature, socially emulous and given to frivolous and trifling pursuits. To the best of my knowledge, there will nowhere be found in Johnson's oeuvre comparable satirical sallies directed against a particular male type or against a particular subdivision of the male species (the "Short Song of Congratulation" on Sir John Lade's entering his majority is an individual satire). It comes not amiss in the present context to cite Mrs Thrale's complaint that Johnson "did indeed say very contemptuous things of our sex" (in Sherbo 149). She does not of course accuse him of doing this habitually but there is no reason to suppose that she is

To bring an inclusive gaze to bear on the examples (in both batches) adduced above, viewing them in their ensemble, is to be struck by the fact that the greater number by far are drawn from the Idler and Adventurer series which by common consent are considered to exemplify Johnson's 'lighter' manner - lighter, that is, than the studiedly dignified, strenuously moral, purposely preceptive manner characteristic of many if not most of the Rambler essays. That so many of the 'pictures of life' are met with in the Idler and Adventurer series is no doubt a

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overstating the case in alleging occasional lapses on his part. But even disregarding the imputation of contempt, the truth is that Johnson's first and characteristic impulse was to side with the man against the woman, with the husband against the wife: "When any disputes arose between our married acquaintance...Mr. Johnson always sided with the husband, 'whom (he said) the woman had probably provoked so often, she scarce knew when or how she had disobliged him first'" (Mrs Thrale, in Sherbo 110; see also Life 1035; however, for a view of Johnson taking a rather different tack see Boswell's Hebrides Journal 294).

The three satirical vignettes referred to above are, on their own, sufficient proof - if proof were needed - of how mistaken Sir Leslie Stephen was in his view of Johnson as a writer with no gift at all for satire pitched in an Horatian 'key'. In his book on Johnson (first published in 1878), Stephen argues that

> Neither his education nor the manners acquired in Grub Street had qualified him to be an observer of those lighter foibles which were touched by Addison with so dexterous a hand. When he ventures upon such topics he flounders dreadfully, and rather reminds us of an artist who should attempt to paint miniatures with a mop. (172)

While this judgment may strike today's reader, encountering it more than a century after it was formulated, as notoriously wrong-headed, it ought yet to be borne in mind that when Stephen framed it he was merely expressing (though at the same time doing his bit to entrench) the outlook of his age - the later Victorian - regarding this particular aspect of the Johnsonian performance. One should add, however, that the view of Johnson as a writer with no aptitude at all for the lighter, satirically-complexioned type of composition was the prevailing one not just in the later years of the Victorian epoch but throughout the whole of it.

reflection of Johnson's having decided in advance to impart a lighter character to these two sequences, thus earmarking them as a natural home for his 'pictures'. At the same time, however, there is a reciprocal process at work which should not be overlooked: while certainly it is the case that so many of the 'pictures of life' are met with in the Idlers and Adventurers thanks to their preordained lighter tone, it is equally the case that this lighter tone in no small measure comes to be what it is thanks precisely to the presence and influence of those very 'pictures' which, on balance, it seems to me, end up contributing at least as much to the two series' more genial 'feel' as they borrow from it.

The imaginative verve vitalizing the most spirited of the 'pictures of life' (many of which are cited above) is very striking. What they bear witness to is an imagination rejoicing in its powers - an imagination vivacious, inventive, diversified and, on occasion, playful; with a taste, and a talent, for comic and even, at times, caricatural portraiture; an imagination alert to the incongruous, absurd and affected in human behaviour, and endued with an aptitude, and a relish too, for exposing these shortcomings through restrained satire. It goes

without saying that these particular aspects of Johnson's 'most fertile imagination' are for the most part studiously excluded from the Rambler series as well as from his other serious writings, as running counter to their prevailing mood and objectives. Consequently, of the more sprightly, more sportive, more diverting side of his imaginative make-up those readers can know little or nothing who know him only from the Ramblers, from Rasselas and from The Vanity of Human Wishes (which are precisely the works most readers do know him by)[84]; or, alternatively, who know him only

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[84] If the critic, William Mudford, writing in 1802, had been acquainted not just with these works, which is where his encounter with the Johnsonian oeuvre appears to have begun and ended, but with the rest of it as well, would he have suffered himself to pronounce upon Johnson this kind of verdict:

> As his reflections were always melancholy, so his writings have the same cast. ...It is difficult to conceive a man more oppressed with melancholy, or more governed by prejudice than Dr. Johnson. In him there is no variation; he is for ever one and the same. All his pictures are alike, and in all we trace the reflection of a cynic. His sensations could seldom be enviable; he must have turned away with visible horror and disgust from all that bore the smiles of happiness, or the gaiety of mirth... (in Boulton 47, 77)

The more colourful, more sprightly side of Johnson's imagination is largely, or wholly, excluded from the works mentioned above not only because it is deemed to sort ill with the moralizing stance and serious purposes determined for them in advance, and also to be at odds with the preceptive role he conceives for himself as their author, but also, more generally, because Johnson, although delighting not seldom in the exercise of his imaginative powers, basically mistrusts imagination, his own especially, fearing its potential for unruliness, for running out of control. B H Bronson speaks of his "lifelong effort to hold it [his imagination] in check" (1965:5), a judgment which seems to me to hit the mark (v. too Bronson's essay "The Double Tradition of Dr. Johnson", ibid. 156-76, esp. p.170). Also relevant in the present context is the forty-fourth chapter of Rasselas, the one entitled "The Dangerous Prevalence [= dominion, ascendancy] of Imagination", in which Imlac, who ordinarily serves as

from his popular image as the Sage, or the Moral Mentor or the Literary Dictator of his epoch. Thus the 'pictures of life' exhibited in the exemplary passages mustered above (not to speak of many others dotted about in the oeuvre which are less lively and less variegated than the ones I have cited) may be able to offer such readers a fresh perspective on Johnson, presenting him in a perhaps less

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Johnson's mouthpiece in the tale, advances the view that "All power of fancy [a term still interchangeable with 'imagination' in the pre-Coleridgean era] over reason is a degree of insanity", and warns against its being allowed to grow "imperious" and "despotick", for then "fictions begin to operate as realities...and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish" (in Bronson (1971) 693, 694).

Recasting Imlac's statement in positive terms, Johnson elsewhere declares that "Reason is the only Source of happiness to reasonable Beings" (Mrs Thrale, in Ingrams 104). While he had no difficulty granting this proposition his philosophical assent, turning it into a precept to live by, and act by, proved to be a quite different, and altogether more complicated matter - because, essentially, it ran counter to the true impulse of his nature (as it probably does to the true impulse of human nature in general). In the end, however, managing by dint of constant struggle and vigilance to hold his volatile temperament in check (cf. Reynolds in Hill II 225-26), he succeeded in 'standing fast for Reason' - but one can only wonder at what emotional cost.

In making happiness contingent upon right reason, Johnson in fact enacts one of the pivotal moves of the Enlightenment's philosophical programme. Consider how close is his phraseology in the formulation above to that of Leibniz who definitively adumbrated the connection between happiness and Reason for the German Enlightenment as a whole (Cassirer 122) in his treatise On Wisdom, from which I cite the following affirmation: "...nothing serves happiness more than the light of reason and the exercise of the will to act at all times according to reason..." (in Cassirer 122).

John Wain summarizes in the following statement some of the main issues raised in the paragraphs above:

> Johnson's trust was in reason. Not only did he come from a civilization that held this faith; he also endured a permanent inner turmoil that had to be held within bounds. He could, of course, have given way to that turmoil and let its waves carry him to some unknown shore. But to say this is to say that Johnson should have been Smart or Hölderlin and not Johnson. (157)

familiar though probably more congenial light.

With these remarks I bring to a conclusion this extended - dare I say over-extended - project of marshalling evidence in support of my thesis that the very build of Johnson's mind was 'lexicographic', that is to say (in the special context of this study), formed for the making of distinctions; and that his making of them was as inveterate as it was because his drive to distinguish was an elemental, inwoven and presiding feature of his psychic organization.

Given the volume, as well as (in my judgment) the cogency of the evidence brought to bear in the foregoing pages, I do not believe that my thesis, as stated in the paragraph above, will easily be dislodged by the argument that, when all is said and done, Johnson really is not all that different, as a maker of distinctions, from anybody else. After all, everybody is busy making distinctions all the time, and were one minded to keep a count of them, one would no doubt notch up a pretty sizable tally by the end of an average day. Yet where the 'man in the street' is concerned it occurs to nobody to assert the claim that they constitute presumptive evidence of a 'mind formed for distinction-making'; so why should this claim be asserted,

and allowed, where Johnson is concerned? Alternatively, if it be allowed in his case, why should it not be allowed in everybody else's? If then, insofar as distinction-making is concerned, he is 'just like everybody else' (or everybody else is just like him), why the great to-do about the build specifically of <u>his</u> mind? Where is the justification for focussing specifically on <u>his</u> psyche as one 'formed for distinction-making'? So the argument might run.

Well, as I have indicated, I don't believe the thesis I have been defending in this study risks being dislodged, or even modified, by the line of argument hypothesized above. The evidence makes it sufficiently clear, it seems to me, that Johnson <u>is</u> different: he is different by reason of the sheer quantity of distinctions he generates (and prodigious though this quantity is, it represents only what 'made it' into the evidential record. What about all the distinctions that didn't - those many distinctions which, purely on the argument that he really was 'just like anybody else', he may be assumed to have fathered in the course of an average day?); he is different also because he frames distinctions of so many different kinds and sub-kinds, and different in being able to do this so

effortlessly; he is different because the distinctions he frames with such ease and naturalness are so incisive and, technically speaking, so accomplished. Accordingly, 'when all is said and done', what still remains to be said, insisted upon, indeed, is that Johnson is different; and this difference, I further submit, has everything to do with the particular 'set' and workings of his psyche.

* * *

I want to ring down the curtain on this chapter by posing a question which I daresay must more than once have crossed the reader's mind in the course of the preceding two hundred or so pages. The question is this: how self-conscious a maker of distinctions was Johnson? After all, he makes an enormous number of them, of many different kinds[85] - so (to somewhat rephrase the question) how aware was he of just what he was doing when he was framing all these distinctions? Naturally, we cannot hope for more than an approximate answer to this question as we have no way of directly interrogating Johnson's psyche; being

[85] I may as well reiterate here a point made earlier, namely, that the very considerable number of examples of distinction-making adduced in this lengthy chapter represents but a fraction of the number actually amassed.

obliged, therefore, to proceed by indirect means, our appeal has to be to the evidential record - and what it suggests, in its written and spoken parts alike, is that any answer to the question posed which is not formulated in terms of the notion of grades or levels of awareness is bound to fall short.

The first point I would want to make is that in the vast majority of cases (about 90% of them at least, I should think) Johnson frames distinctions (of all types) without betraying any awareness whatever of being engaged in the business of distinction-making. He simply formulates his distinction and there he leaves it; no further comment of a possibly reflexive or self-regarding character comes into the picture at all. As the absence of any suggestion of self-conscious awareness affects such a very high percentage of his distinction-making output, it has to be viewed as a highly significant phenomenon[86], and one moreover which both accords with, and appears to bear out, a basic hypothesis of this study, the hypothesis

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[86] In viewing as 'highly significant' the near-total absence from Johnson's distinction-making of any self-conscious awareness, I am only too well aware myself of being reliant on the argumentum e silentio (the argument from silence) which, though plainly susceptible of misuse, and obviously of questionable validity when put to questionable uses, seems to me, in the present instance, to be a legitimate argumentative resource - and a telling one too.

that Johnson's distinction-making bent was a feature of his psychic organization so elemental as to result, in the overwhelming majority of cases, in wholly involuntary and unconscious acts of distinction-making ('unwilled accomplishments', to recur to Ohmann's phrase), thanks to which they would necessarily have passed unnoticed, and would therefore have escaped remark, at the moment of occurrence. So one would have to conclude, with reference to the question posed, that Johnson, so far from being a self-conscious maker of distinctions, was, in the overwhelming majority of cases, an unconscious maker of them.

In a small minority of instances, however, his distinction-making praxis does manifest a measure of self-consciousness which takes the form, at a lower level of cognition, of his signalling at least an implicit awareness of the presence of a distinction in his discourse. In addition, he on occasion rises to a relatively higher level of self-consciousness; this is the level at which he reveals an implicit awareness of himself as a maker of distinctions, as actually engaged in the enterprise of distinction-making. Having discriminated these two levels of self-consciousness, let me begin my analysis by

considering manifestations of distinction-making that exhibit what to me seems to be a 'low grade' of awareness. I refer under this head to instances in which Johnson, through the purposeful inclusion of the terms 'distinction' or 'difference' in the wording of a statement, implicitly signals his awareness of its containing - indeed, of its pivoting on - a distinction. But taking the further step of actually pointing up his role as a distinction-maker is something he does not do - not here; that only happens at the second level of awareness, and even then only implicitly. For the present, however, let me bring forward some examples of distinction-making operating at what I view as a low level of self-consciousness:

> There is a great difference between what is said without our being urged to it, and what is said from a kind of compulsion. (Life 390)
>
> The distinction is clear between what is of moral and what is of ritual [in the religious sense] obligation. (Life 636)
>
> ...the difference between approving laws, and obeying them, is frequently forgotten... (Rambler 76, IV 34)
>
> ...though the printing-house may properly be

> compared to the infernal regions, for the facility of its entrance, and the difficulty with which authors return from it; yet there is this difference, that a great genius can never return to his former state, by a happy draught of the waters of oblivion. (Rambler 16, III 87-88)

This 'low-grade' paradigm also comes to expression in a more emphatic form; in these instances not only is the distinction itself 'pitched' in a rather more emphatic register but a strong sense of its needfulness is conveyed as well, and so the impression is created of Johnson's being conscious not just of his discourse containing a distinction but of that distinction's being also of some considerable importance. This more emphatic and at the same time somewhat more self-conscious mode of distinction-making is exemplified by the following items:

> ...one of the company...asked Sir James Johnston if he intended to be present [at the bar of the House of Commons]. He answered that he believed he should not, because he paid little regard to the arguments of counsel at the bar of the House of Commons. "Wherefore do you pay little regard

to their arguments, Sir?" said Dr. Johnson. "Because," replied Sir James, "they argue for their fee." "What is it to you, Sir," rejoined Dr. Johnson, "what they argue for? you have nothing to do with their motive, but you ought to weigh their argument. Sir, you seem to confound argument with assertion, but there is an essential distinction between them. Assertion is like an arrow shot from a long-bow; the force with which it strikes depends on the strength of the arm that draws it. But argument is like an arrow from a cross-bow, which has equal force, whether shot by a boy or a giant." (in Hill II 409)

"Sir, (continued he) there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and <u>there</u> is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson." (<u>Life</u> 389) [emphasis in original]

JOHNSON: I do not myself think that a man should say in a dedication what he could not say in a history. However, allowance should be made; for

there is a great difference. The known style of a dedication is flattery: it professes to flatter. (Hebrides Journal 333)

...This led us to consider whether it did not require great abilities to be very wicked. JOHNSON: ...Consider only what act of wickedness requires great abilities to commit it, when once the person who is to do it has the power; for there is the distinction. It requires great abilities to conquer an army, but none to massacre it after it is conquered. (Hebrides Journal 288) [emphasis in original]

The second, relatively higher level of self-consciousness attained by Johnson is one at which he seems to be, in some degree, actually 'present' to himself as a maker of distinctions. This higher level of awareness tends to come into view in association with his adopting a posture of advocacy relative to a given distinction; that is to say, when he seeks, by means of certain cues, to impress upon his reader (or interlocutor) the necessity of being particularly attentive to the distinction being (or about to be) drawn. That he enjoins this kind of attentiveness upon his interlocutor (or reader) surely

implies an at least tolerably well-defined sense of himself as a framer of distinctions worthy of attention. The mere fact, however, that in order to arrive at this conclusion I am compelled to fall back upon the expedient of inferential reasoning makes it clear that the evidence for Johnson's 'second, relatively higher level of self-consciousness' is never better than implicit, indirect. For all that, it still manages, in my view, to convey a sense of his being, to some degree, 'present' to himself as a maker of distinctions. When he says to Mrs Thrale, in the first passage cited below, "Madam, we must distinguish", he seems, implicitly, to be thus 'present' to himself; and so too, it seems to me, in the other five examples. But let the reader judge for himself; here is the evidence:

> A young lady who had married a man much her inferiour in rank being mentioned, a question arose how a woman's relations should behave to her in such a situation. ...Mrs Thrale was all for mildness and forgiveness, and, according to the vulgar phrase, 'making the best of a bad bargain.' JOHNSON: Madam, we must distinguish. Were I a man of rank, I would not let a daughter

starve who had made a mean marriage; but having voluntarily degraded herself from the station which she was originally entitled to hold, I would support her only in that which she herself had chosen; and would not put her on a level with my other daughters. (Life 601)

The author of these memoirs [Arthur Murphy, an Irishman] well remembers, that Johnson one day asked him, "Have you observed the difference between your own country impudence and Scottish impudence?" The answer being in the negative: "Then I will tell you," said Johnson. "The impudence of an Irishman is the impudence of a fly, that...teazes you. The impudence of a Scotsman is the impudence of a leech, that...sucks your blood." (in Hill I 427)

...he who does his best, however little, is always to be distinguished from him who does nothing. (Rambler 177, V 172)

Affectation is always to be distinguished from hypocrisy, as being the art of counterfeiting those qualities, which we might, with innocence and safety, be known to want. (Rambler 20, III

113)

> When the discovery of secrets is under consideration, there is always a distinction carefully to be made between our own and those of another... (Rambler 13, III 70)
>
> Patience and submission are very carefully to be distinguished from cowardice and indolence. (Rambler 32, III 177)

Although the examples assembled above show Johnson reaching a 'crowning point' of self-consciousness as a maker of distinctions, it is evident that this point, measured by any more general standard, is actually a very modest one indeed; Johnson's peak, judged by a more universal yardstick, comes out looking like a hummock. To 'make the grade' as a genuinely, 'certifiably' self-conscious framer of distinctions, he would need to have executed a series of moves which in fact he never does execute: he would need formally and deliberately to have called attention to himself as a maker of distinctions, and to have pronounced with reflexive awareness on their role, as well as on their importance, both in his oeuvre and in the organization and operation of his psyche; he would need somehow to have stepped outside himself, viewing his

distinction-making praxis objectively and impersonally, as if through the eyes of another; detachedly appraising his proficiency at it - rather as, in a miniature manifestation of self-conscious reflection, he appraises the quality of his performance as a lexicographer:

> BOSWELL [referring to Johnson's Dictionary]: You did not know what you were undertaking. JOHNSON: Yes, Sir, I knew very well what I was undertaking - and very well how to do it - and have done it very well. (Life 1034)

Of the various 'moves' detailed above, Johnson executed none - to go by what the evidential record tells us, at any rate. While not gainsaying this fact, we may yet very properly ask whether he could have been, or why he should have been, more aware of his distinction-making praxis, and of himself as a distinction-maker, than in fact he was (or, more accurately, perhaps, wasn't). So could he have been more self-conscious than he in fact turned out to be? Assuming, as I do, such a very high level of involuntariness in his distinction-making praxis, I would have to say that I doubt it - because if his distinction-making were as unconscious and involuntary an activity as I believe it to have been, one would then have to ask where

those perceivable, 'outcropping' cues (one could also think of them as 'triggers') could have come from upon which even the possibility of his switching into a more self-conscious mode of awareness would necessarily have depended. Then, aside from the issue of his capacity for greater self-consciousness, there is the further question of why he ever should have been more self-conscious as a framer of distinctions than he was. What incentive, what spur, was there to make him so? I can think of none; on the contrary, I can only think of disincentives. For a start, designedly to train the spotlight upon oneself, one's mental peculiarities, and the methods and mannerisms characteristic of one's praxis, deliberately framing them as a focus of attention, would have been viewed, in the pre-Romantic era, as being in very questionable taste, as tending indeed towards singularity, if not out-and-out freakishness. And, certainly, there is nothing I can point to in Johnson's social and literary milieu which might have prompted, or tempted, him to behave in that kind of way. On the contrary, the decorous, sociable, 'clubable' circles in which he moved and had his being would have acted as a natural brake upon any unseemly drift towards hyper-self-conscious oddity. The fact is that a hyper-self-conscious

posture, praxis, and 'perspective-on-things', in the arts especially, are much more a later twentieth-century ideal than they ever were a later eighteenth-century one - and Sterne's Tristram Shandy is surely the exception that proves the rule: it was certainly felt in its day to stand out as an anomaly, if not an aberration[87]. In conclusion, then, I have to say that I am unable to detect anything in Johnson's milieu which might have served as an incentive spurring him to be more self-conscious as a maker of distinctions than in fact he was.

If Johnson never self-consciously (in the generally accepted sense of the word) brings under scrutiny either his distinction-making praxis or himself as a framer of distinctions, he equally never (to judge from the evidential record) turns a detached, impersonal gaze upon the activity of distinction-making per se - that is, considered in its own right and as a theoretical construct. Thus considered, this activity may be examined from a number of angles - as an aspect of the workings of the

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[87] Cf. Johnson's observation: "Nothing odd will do long. Tristram Shandy did not last" (Life 696). If this was true in 1776, when Johnson made the observation, and if it remained true through the nineteenth century, it certainly is true no longer. But is not the twentieth century's 'rediscovery' of this work precisely, and first and foremost, a reflection of our current obsession with metafiction, and with trying to discover, and recover, past evidences of it?

mind; as an attribute of discourse, or simply as a topic worthy of general disinterested discussion, perhaps at a Johnsonian 'symposium' at the Turk's Head or the Mitre. Johnson examines the activity of distinction-making from none of these angles. It is not just that he never interrogates this subject 'philosophically' - that is, systematically, theoretically, with an eye to giving an account of its foundations, nature, and import - he simply never interrogates it at all. This is an abstention which I suppose could be accounted for (at a theoretical level, anyway) in terms of the observation (made of Cicero) that a "great practitioner does not need to explain the theoretical basis of his art" (in Vickers 99). Johnson is undoubtedly a great practitioner of distinction-making, but it is not, in my view, for the reason suggested in this dictum that he has nothing to say about the 'theoretical basis of his art'. One could of course also speculate that neither his interests nor his circle of acquaintance were such as to prompt, or to provoke, a disinterested discussion about distinction-making regarded as a 'warrantable' topic of conversation in its own right. Given the intellectual climate of the day, such a subject would indeed have had an outlandish 'feel' to it were it

to be proposed as a serious topic for discussion. But, as against these surmises, it is well to remember that when it came to topics for discussion and debate, there was very little that Johnson and his circle shrank from; they were quite ready to 'take on board' almost any subject under the sun, outlandish or otherwise, and without needing to be 'provoked' into doing so[88]. No, the reason, it seems to me, why he has nothing to say about the activity of distinction-making per se is that he was simply too close to it in his experience and praxis to be aware of it as an autonomous phenomenon inviting disinterested scrutiny.

Summing up, then, my conclusions are, first, that Johnson was but rarely 'present' to himself as a maker of distinctions, and that when he was, it was at a level of self-consciousness that one would have to characterize as very modest - at best (to describe even its 'crowning point' as 'high-grade' would be to appeal to a yardstick so permissive as to be meaningless). Second: of a deliberate, disinterested, objective scrutiny of his distinction-making praxis there is no suggestion at all in

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[88] Pertinent in this connection is Thomas Woodman's observation that there "seems to be nothing that Johnson cannot grasp, nothing that he is not interested in and prepared to speak about" (33). Woodman frames this well-aimed judgment within the context of a consideration of "the amazing range and copiousness of [Johnson's] conversation" (idem).

the evidential record. Nor, finally, is there any hint in it of his inquiring into the distinction-making activity as such, as an autonomous phenomenon, or of his being even tempted to do so. Thus it is that in pursuing the question of how self-conscious Johnson was as a maker of distinctions, our search leads us, more often than not, to a silence - a silence which is not the product of deliberate choice but instead reflects the absence from his milieu, social and literary, of any spur to pronounce reflexively and self-consciously either upon his own distinction-making praxis or upon the activity of distinction-making considered per se; or, having regard to the extremely high level of involuntariness characterizing his praxis, it is a silence which may be seen as reflecting the likelihood of self-conscious pronouncement on this subject being virtually beyond the reach of possibility for him.

CONCLUSION

Johnson's mind and 'soul' were sufficiently comprehensive, his interests sufficiently wide-ranging, his acquirements sufficiently numerous and variegated, his opinions, written and spoken, sufficiently abundant and diversified (as well as sufficiently well-documented and, let it be said, sufficiently inconsistent among themselves - v. Fussell (1972) 42-43, 60-61), to render not just explicable but also well-aimed and pertinent Marshall Waingrow's observation that "Samuel Johnson will always be somebody's hypothesis" (1). Truly spoken; for Johnson is a vast and various continent with enough in it to support many, and perhaps conflicting, hypothetical constructs. So the hypothesis I have advanced and have endeavoured, in the pages of this study, to defend, is but one 'reading' among the many that the 'Great Cham's' comprehensiveness and many-sidedness undoubtedly invite. No wonder that when he died William Gerard Hamilton spoke, not less truthfully than memorably (and in the best tradition of Johnson's own distinction-making praxis to boot) of the "chasm" he had left "which not only nothing can fill up, but which nothing

has a tendency to fill up" (Life 1394-95).

So, then, taking my cue from Waingrow's observation, and only too aware of how limited and partial (unavoidably so) must be my view of the man and his mind, let me recapitulate my Johnsonian hypothesis. I see him as a having a mind formed for distinction-making, and as having been born into the world with that kind of mind which, given its particular disposition, is not unreasonably characterized as 'lexicographic'. This posited, it follows that I view his actual 'drive to distinguish', that is, the observable praxis, as manifested in innumerable individual instances of distinction-making, as the expression of a constitutional mental bent, as the palpable projection, the 'staging', of the very cast and 'set' of his psyche (or of one of its principal facets, at any rate). With a mind built the way his was, Johnson's pre-eminence as a 'high-flyer' among distinction-makers (lexicographers particularly) was doubtless assured, regardless of whether or not additional factors came into play to accelerate the development or boost the potency of his distinction-making bent. It seems to me, however, that an intensifying intervention did in fact occur, and its effect was to turn what in any case would never have been less than a leading

temperamental trait into something much more like a habit of mind which then, over time, became a more or less involuntary 'reflex'. So in what did this 'intensifying intervention' consist? It consisted in the boost given to Johnson's already healthy distinction-making bent by two inter-related and puissant aspirations. Dating very probably from the years of his young manhood, these were, first, to be always as perspicuous as possible[1] and, second, to "disentangl[e] combinations and separat[e] similitudes" (in Bronson (1971) 253). The boost these aspirations gave to Johnson's distinction-making bent arose from the fact that their own realization depended upon the making of distinctions as a prerequisite move.

Since the brief I have given myself in this study is to build a defensible case in relation to a phenomenon as complex, enigmatic, inscrutable, even, as the 'set' and operations of a mind, it becomes a matter of the first

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[1] Pertinent in this context is the following passage taken from the Life:

> Sir Joshua Reynolds once asked [Johnson] by what means he had attained his extraordinary accuracy and flow of language. He told him, that he had early laid it down as a fixed rule to do his best on every occasion, and in every company; to impart whatever he knew in the most forcible language he could put it in; and that by constant practice, and never suffering any careless expressions to escape him, or attempting to deliver his thoughts without arranging them in the clearest manner, it became habitual to him. (145)

importance, if the hypothesis I advance is to be vindicable and, beyond that, persuasive, to adduce enough evidence. To recur to a point made in my Introduction but one that bears restating: no investigation conducted on psychocritical lines that is not built on a solid, indeed dense, evidential base can hope to be taken seriously or to have staying power; where there is no such base, there is only free-fall (exciting perhaps for a while, but in the end fatal) into the untethered realm of unsupported assertion, conjecture, guesses and hunches. It is well to underline the point that in investigations of a psychocritical character the notion of a 'solid evidential base' implies, in the first instance, a sufficient quantity of evidence; in such investigations the volume of evidence is as important as its cogency. Even so, I cannot but be aware that I will be thought to have overdone things as regards the amount of evidence presented. In seeking to counter this charge I am obliged to fall back on the 'plea in extenuation' - one, however, that is modelled on an argument Johnson himself relies on in the apologia with which he brings to a close his Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language. So my plea, echoing Johnson's, is that sometimes the desire to carry conviction "urge[d] me to

superfluities". And, by the way, though the reader may not believe it, I am able, in good faith, to echo his next sentence as well, and to affirm, without exaggeration, that "sometimes the fear of prolixity betray[ed] me to omissions" (in Wilson 139). Be that as it may, one thing is certain, and that is that no quantity of evidence, however voluminous, will ever be able to force 'final, incontrovertible proofs' out of any inquiry conducted on psychocritical lines; that this is so is simply in the nature of the case. Amplitude of evidence may be able to persuade, to bear out an hypothesis, to impart to argument the force of demonstration, but it will never be able to lay bare the 'foundational truth' about the psyche of someone like Johnson, who now lives, vigorously and vividly though it be, only in the record of his discourse. Accordingly, as I said in an earlier chapter, I have not been looking to furnish 'proofs' in this study, but simply to construct a plausible, defensible case.

While engaged in the present inquiry I have from time to time heard the view expressed that "Everybody knows Johnson was a maker of distinctions, so why the need for an elaborate investigation to show what is already known?" The answer I would want to return to this objection falls

into two inter-connecting parts: to begin with, I would have to pose the question whether there can ever be 'knowing' without 'showing'. Can there really be knowledge (properly so called) without demonstration (be it never so toilsome and tedious)? I greatly doubt it; and when the pressure of such doubt becomes insistent enough, it is then that someone feels the need, whatever may be his field of inquiry, to actually show what 'everybody' claims to 'know'. In this point is already discernible its concomitant, namely, that formulations such as 'Everybody knows...' are notoriously loose, inexact and 'sleight-of-handish' (probably designedly so). Staying with this locution, what one notices is that the word 'know' is really just a cover-term performing the office of screening from view behind a façade of cool certitude and implied unchallengeability nothing more than a congeries of sensings, hunches and intuitions, none of which have very much in common with 'knowing' and 'knowledge', properly so called. And it surely cannot be accounted any great fault to wish to replace hunches and intuitions with something more dependable, more secure, something perhaps even approaching knowledge. Johnson speaks in Rambler 92 of criticism having among its objectives the task of

"improv[ing] opinion into knowledge" (IV 122); if this study goes some of the way towards achieving that goal I shall be well content. There is a passage in Idler 36 which bears directly upon the issue being raised here. It is a passage in which Johnson tilts wittily at the "stately son of demonstration, who proves with mathematical formality what no man has yet pretended [= professed] to doubt" (II 113). But to look beyond this diverting sally at the expense of a pretty easy target is to recognize, I believe, that Johnson is being unfair to the 'son of demonstration'; and he is being unfair because, ruled by his satiric purpose, he on this occasion forbears to draw a distinction: that is the distinction - and it is an important one - between not claiming to doubt something and being actually furnished with the grounds that, at a pragmatic level (if not at an abstract, theoretical one), might render doubt unnecessary and, in so far, help to 'improve opinion into knowledge'. And who is it that is best placed to furnish such grounds if it is not the 'son of demonstration'? So, despite Johnson's disparaging swipe, the 'son of demonstration' has, it seems to me, a valid and necessary role to perform. It is such a role that I have sought to discharge in the pages of the present

inquiry.

APPENDIX A

HOW TRUSTWORTHY A RECORDER OF JOHNSON'S CONVERSATION WAS BOSWELL?

To this question my answer is "trustworthy enough". While Boswell obviously could not preserve everything that Johnson said, what he did preserve constitutes, in essentials, a sufficiently reliable record of his "illustrious friend's" conversation. Though he left gaps he neither made things up (though he did touch them up) nor falsified them. What he claims for his chronicle of Johnson's conversation is the following:

> I must, again and again, intreat of my readers not to suppose that my imperfect record of conversation contains the whole of what was said by Johnson, or other eminent persons who lived with him. What I have preserved, however, has the value of the most perfect authenticity. (Life 617)

The form of words used by Boswell here is notably careful, even lawyerly - "What I have preserved has the

value of the most perfect authenticity" he writes, the suggestion being that while his record of Johnson's talk is not to be held to a literal, verbatim standard of authenticity, nonetheless it can still justifiably claim to have "the value of the most perfect authenticity" in that it constitutes in all essentials an accurate and reliable record[1]. If this is Boswell's claim, as I believe it is, then it is, I further believe, a well-founded one. My reasons for maintaining this view are the following:

First, at the most general level: Boswell looked upon the writing of the Life of Johnson as a sacred trust[2], and to have paltered with the truth in composing the biography of a man who so reverenced it[3] would have been to betray

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[1] Thus also Pat Rogers: "Of course we do not have in any of these cases [i.e. the various extant records of Johnson's talk] a literal word-for-word transcription of the conversation, but the main flow and the spirit have survived" (75).

[2] Germane in this connection is the following passage from the Journal of the Hebrides tour:

> The Sunday evening that we sat by ourselves at Aberdeen, I asked him several particulars of his early years, which he readily told me; and I wrote them down before him. This day I proceeded in my inquiries, also writing them in his presence. I have them on detached sheets. I shall collect authentick materials for The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.; and, if I survive him, I shall be one who will most faithfully do honour to his memory. (351)

[3] Germane here is this passage from the Life:

> He [Johnson] inculcated upon all his friends the importance of perpetual vigilance against the slightest degrees of falsehood; the effect of which, as Sir Joshua Reynolds observed to me, has been, that all who were of his school are distinguished for a love of truth and

this trust. Boswell would not have been blind, or indifferent, to the point of moral delicacy involved here since he was not blind or indifferent to it elsewhere - for example, in the difficult matter of getting on with his father, in his endeavour to reconcile the claims of wife and family with his special feeling for Johnson and for his other London friends, in his attempts (as often as not ineffectual) to confront his numerous lapses and shortcomings. Boswell was a complex and contradictory man[4] but he was not a moral philistine.

The status of the Life as a sacred trust imposed upon him, in a manner particularly exigent, the obligations of fidelity and scrupulousness. Of these obligations he did not cease to be sensible. In his Advertisement to the first edition of the Life he notes the pains he has been at in order to "ascertain with a scrupulous authenticity" "innumerable detached particulars" (4). He recalls that

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> accuracy, which they would not have possessed in the same degree, if they had not been acquainted with Johnson. (900) [emphasis in original]

This passage suggests the following thought: Boswell was himself of course of Johnson's 'school', and known to be. In light of this fact does not his mention of Reynolds's observation look a bit like a canny manoeuvre intended to lend additional support, by indirect means, to his claim to be a truthful and accurate reporter in the Life?

[4] Witness the following from his London Journal: "What a curious, inconsistent thing is the mind of man! In the midst of divine service I was laying plans for having women, and yet I had the most sincere feelings of religion" (54).

"I have sometimes been obliged to run half over London, in order to fix a date correctly" (idem). In his Dedi-cation to Edmond Malone prefatory to the Journal of the Hebrides tour (1785), he is careful to place on record the following: "You have obligingly taken the trouble to peruse the original manuscript [vetted by Johnson himself[5]] of this tour, and can vouch for the strict fidelity of the present publication" (155). In my opinion, Boswell, in the examples here given (as well as in many others), protests persuasively rather than 'too much'. The fact of the matter is, after all, that "none of Johnson's friends complained about the reliability of Boswell's reports" (Rogers 75). This "crucial fact", as Rogers terms it, points to the conclusion that "[i]f the persons best qualified to judge, that is, the circle of Johnson's acquaintance who had heard him perform so often, were disinclined to fault Boswell for accuracy...it would be comic for a twentieth-century reader to harbour suspicions of grave acts of tampering with the text" (idem).

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[5] As, indeed, he vetted - or, at the least, perused - Boswell's Journal entries upon which, he already knew, the intended Life was to be based: "He was much pleased with my paying so great attention to his recommendation in 1763, the period when our acquaintance began, that I should keep a journal; and I could perceive he was secretly pleased to find so much of the fruit of his mind preserved; and as he had been used to imagine and say that he always laboured when he said a good thing - it delighted him, on a review, to find that his conversation teemed with point and imagery" (Life 923).

Second: through happy chance more than anything else, Boswell was singularly well prepared and well equipped to be the recorder of Johnson's conversation. He was blessed with a retentive memory. On top of that "he had been engaged in journal-writing of one sort or another ever since he was a boy in his teens. When he first met Johnson, in May, 1763, at the age of twenty-two and a half, he was already a master of this practice. He had formed the habit of recording anecdotes, partly, no doubt, that he might be qualified as a raconteur of renown, and partly to train himself in accuracy of statement" (C B Tinker "Introduction" to Boswell's Life (Oxford Standard Authors) xvi). Moreover, Boswell, by training and calling, was a lawyer; he belonged to a profession in which accuracy of statement is a sine qua non. Says Tinker: "He had the ardour of the collector united to the accuracy of the lawyer" (ibid. xii).

Third: Boswell's methodology in recording, compiling and, finally, giving shape and coherence to the chronicle of Johnson's conversation was such, on the whole, as to inspire confidence in the accuracy of his transcript. Sometimes, "in defiance of social decorum", he would separate himself "from the company to make a written record

of what was taking place" - an idiosyncrasy which "disconcerted or displeased" (Page xi). At other times, relying on the retentiveness of his memory and on his long training as a journal-keeper, he would commit to his page rough notes of the most notable passages and most striking phrases in Johnson's conversation not long after they had been uttered (usually the same evening or the next day)[6]. These jottings would later be worked up into a more intelligible form which Tinker designates the "second state" ("Introduction" op. cit. xvii)[7]. The jottings of

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[6] Consider, in this connection, the testimony of the Scottish philosopher, Dugald Stewart, a rough contemporary of Boswell. Stewart speaks of the "scrupulous fidelity with which...he was accustomed to record every conversation which he thought interesting, a few hours after it took place" (in Hill II 425).

[7] Boswell's record-keeping practices, as they bear upon both the first and second 'states' (to use Tinker's terminology) of the conversational record, are revealingly alluded to in the following passage from the Life:

> ...and during the remaining part of my stay in London [I] kept very imperfect notes of his [Johnson's] conversation, which had I according to my usual custom written out at large soon after the time, much might have been preserved, which is now irretrievably lost. I can now only record some particular scenes, and a few fragments of his memorabilia. (632)

Marshall Waingrow, working from those of the Boswell Papers that pertain to the writing of the Life, shows, by way of some striking examples, how Boswell's text changed as it passed through its successive 'states'. These examples shed a fascinating light upon the biographer's compositional and editorial practice as he pushed forward to the final version of his magnum opus. In the specimen I have chosen for citation, Boswell has to do, as it happens, not with Johnson's discourse but with that of Dr Adams; however, the way he goes about things here reflects his habitual practice, and so his procedure would not have been any different had his 'raw material' been of Johnsonian provenance.

The jottings that Tinker refers to as the 'first state', Waingrow labels "Rough Notes"; and what Tinker designates the 'second

the Hebrides Journal were worked up into their 'second

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state' Waingrow styles "Expansion". The specimen presented here is tracked through three successive versions, beginning with the 'shorthand' jottings and ending with the finished product, the published text:

Rough Notes

> present first night of Irene [Johnson's only play] Catcalls Then murder etc. Mrs Pritch obliged to go off alive.

Expansion

> Dr. Adams told me he was present the first night when Irene was acted. There were Catcalls whistling before the Curtain drew up which was alarming. The Prologue soothed the Audience. The play went off tolerably, till it came to the Conclusion when Mrs Pritchard was to be strangled upon the Stage, and was to speak two lines with the bowstring round her neck. They cried out Murder Murder. She several times attempted to speak. But in vain. At last she was obliged to go off the Stage alive. Dr. Adams beleives [sic] it was altered afterwards.

Life [140-41]

> Dr. Adams was present the first night of the representation of Irene, and gave me the following account: "Before the curtain drew up, there were catcalls whistling, which alarmed Johnson's friends. The Prologue, which was written by himself in a manly strain, soothed the audience, and the play went off tolerably, till it came to the conclusion, when Mrs. Pritchard, the heroine of the piece, was to be strangled upon the stage, and was to speak two lines with the bowstring round her neck. The audience cried out 'Murder! Murder!' She several times attempted to speak; but in vain. At last she was obliged to go off the stage alive." This passage was afterwards struck out, and she was carried off to be put to death behind the scenes, as the play now has it.

On the basis of the examples he offers, Waingrow draws the following general conclusions:

> The refinement of language was Boswell's confirmed practice, whether he was working with his own texts or those of others; but it was not his custom to call attention to this freedom. [However]...when he gives a verbatim reproduction of his text...he lets the reader know it. ...Taken together, [his] revisions may be understood as filling out an elliptical record and polishing an abbreviated or colloquial style. ...[T]here has been no loss or distortion of the essential content... (xxviii-xxxi)

state' with little delay because Boswell wanted to have new copy for Johnson to scrutinize at short and regular intervals. It was owing to this circumstance that the Journal, in contrast to the Life, proved relatively easy to prepare for publication.

A few pages back, in a footnote, I cited a passage from the Hebrides Journal which highlights Boswell's fastidiousness as a chronicler and record-keeper: having obtained at first hand particulars of Johnson's early years he then takes care to place them on record "in his presence" (351). Sometimes he treated Johnson's conversation in the same way: there were occasions when he was so struck by the penetration and trenchancy of his friend's discourse that he would insist there and then on taking down a verbatim transcript from dictation, as in the following instance:

> One day, when I told him that I was a zealous Tory, but not enough 'according to knowledge', and should be obliged to him for a 'reason', he was so candid, and expressed himself so well, that I begged of him to repeat what he had said, and I wrote down as follows... (Life 1154)

In general, Boswell made good use of the advantage he

enjoyed, while amassing his 'authentick materials' for the prospective Life, of being able to consult with its subject on the accuracy of the record. One such consultation took place on Friday, 10 April 1778:

> I found Johnson at home in the morning. We resumed the conversation of yesterday. He put me in mind of some of it which had escaped my memory, and enabled me to record it more perfectly than I otherwise could have done. (Life 923)

If this proceeding, together with the others I have noted, bolsters confidence in Boswell's claim to be a reliable chronicler of his friend's conversation, so does another which tends in the same direction, though more obliquely. I refer here to his not infrequent outbursts of self-recrimination in which he upbraids himself for having neglected, through indolence or inattention, to place Johnson's conversation on record. Here is a representative enough example drawn from the Hebrides Journal:

> Often must I have occasion to upbraid myself, that soon after our return to the main land, I allowed indolence to prevail over me so much, as

> to shrink from the labour of continuing my Journal with the same minuteness as before; sheltering myself in the thought, that we had done with the Hebrides; and not considering, that Dr Johnson's Memorabilia were likely to be more valuable when we were restored to more polished society. Much has thus been irrecoverably lost. (393)

The admissions made in this passage (and in others like it) function in two ways, both of them indirect, to bolster Boswell's credit as a trustworthy chronicler. In the first place, his candour as such speaks in his favour: after all, these are admissions and self-recriminations which need never have seen the light of day; he could easily have chosen to pass over the whole issue in silence, and nobody would have been the wiser. Thus, by an interesting paradox, Boswell's admission that something is missing from his text testifies as loudly in his favour as what is actually there. In the second place (and more to the purpose in the present context), there is this point: that embedded in the admissions he makes, and particularly the last, "Much has thus been irrecoverably lost", is a suggestion that cannot but work in his favour - the

suggestion that he would not think of stooping to invention, making things up, in order to plug the gaps created by what had been 'irrecoverably lost'. That the loss is irrecoverable may be lamented, but irrecoverable it remains, and there can be no question of trying to make it good through a resort to dishonest expedients.

Boswell allowed himself the liberty of making adjustments (which in no way implies falsification) to the Johnsonian record at what Tinker refers to as the "final stage of the...work": "It was at this point that he permitted himself the subtle privilege...of occasionally touching up a Johnsonian phrase, submitting it to that Johnsonian 'ether' with which...his mind had gradually become impregnated"[8] (op. cit. xvii). More recent criticism, which has tended to highlight the fictionalizing, dramatizing, imaginatively recreating aspects of the Life and the Journal to a degree Tinker could not have imagined necessary or even possible, sees in what he called Boswell's 'touching up' of Johnson's talk something a good deal more interventionist (v. Clingham, Boswell: The Life of Johnson 5, 41ff). But even taking

[8] Cf. R W Chapman: "Boswell was not content merely to transcribe his memoranda. He was not afraid to be an artist, and to let his knowledge and genius 'Johnsonise' what was necessarily raw material" (in Page xv).

account of the caveats entered by recent critics, I still believe that we can feel confident about the basic reliability of the Johnsonian record as handed down to us by Boswell, provided we don't expect it to be a kind of official Hansard of Johnson's talk. Frederick Pottle has made the comment that "Johnson's conversation as Boswell reported it, is, for all its veridicality an imaginative construction; it is embedded in a narrative made continuously lively by unobtrusive specks of imagination" (in Clingham 44). Fair enough, but I don't think any violence is done to the truth if, switching around Pottle's distribution of emphasis, we were to say that Boswell's Johnsonian record is, first and foremost, a veridical construction, and is not any the less so for being at the same time an imaginative one.

APPENDIX B

JOHNSON'S DISTINCTION-MAKING BY TYPE: AS ARRANGED IN CATEGORIES GROUPED UNDER 'THEMATIC' HEADS

ETHICAL	(1) Distinctions Bearing on Moral Concerns
PHILOSOPHICAL	(2) Distinctions Modelled on Philosophical Schemata
	(3) Things in Themselves Distinguished from their Effects
CONCEPTUAL	(4) Distinctions of Ideas
	(5) A Specific Instance Expressly Distinguished from a more or less Undifferentiated Backdrop
VERBAL	(6) Distinctions to Clarify a Word's Signification or Usage
	(7) Shades of Verbal Meaning: Distinctions between Near-Synonyms
RHETORICAL	(8) Distinctions by appeal to Analogy
	(9) Distinction-making within the Frame of the Contrastive Set-piece
	(10) Distinctions by way of Alternatives
	(11) Distinctions by way of Denial/Exclusion followed by Affirmation
	(12) Distinctions by way of Antimetabole (Chiasmus)
	(13) Distinguishing the 'Truth of the Matter' from Commonly Held Beliefs
	(14) Distinction-making by way of Enumeration/Hierarchical Ordering
FUNCTIONAL	(15) Disallowing a Distinction Claimed - in order to Dispel Confusion or Misperception
	(16) Asserting a Distinction in order to Dispel Confusion or Misperception
PICTORIAL	(17) Discriminating the Manifold Facets of a 'Picture of Life'

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